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INTENDED FOR THE USE OF

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ASSEMBLED FOR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

IN COUNTRY VILLAGES.

BY GEOGRE BURDER.

SEVEN VOLUMES IN THREE.

VOL. III.

Come, let us go forth into the Field; let us lodge in the Villages.
Sol. Song.

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SERMON LXVI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

John xvii. 3. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.

THE belief of a God is the foundation of all religion. If we "come to God," for the purpose of worship, we "must believe that *he is*;" and we cannot come to him aright, without knowing *what he is*, or what are the perfections which he possesses. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance to obtain a right knowledge of his character; and this is what is affirmed by "the faithful and true witness" in the words of our text. Our Lord asserts that "it is eternal life" to know the only true God —that is, it is the means, the *way*, the sure and only way to eternal life:—that there is a *connexion* between the right knowledge of the only true God, and the attainment of eternal felicity, of which, indeed, this knowledge furnishes the true Christian with the beginning and the earnest.

Let us here consider,

1. The glorious *objects* of saving knowledge; and,
2. The *connexion* of this knowledge with eternal life.

I. The great and glorious objects of saving knowledge, mentioned in the text, are—"the only true God," and "his Son Jesus Christ."

The mind of man was formed for knowledge. He is endowed with faculties superior to those of all other creatures upon earth, which render him capable of obtaining the knowledge of God. You cannot, by any means, communicate to the most sagacious animal, the least idea of the great Creator; but man was originally made in "the image" of his Maker; of which image, "knowledge" formed an essential part; and when fallen man is renewed by grace, in the image of God, he is renewed "in knowledge and true holiness."

It is an unhappy consequence of man's apostacy from God, that he is not disposed to seek him. On the contrary, wicked men say to God, in their hearts and by their practice, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." In all other matters, it is natural to man to look at every object around him, and to ask—What is it? What is it for? Whence does it come? Man naturally enquires into the reasons and causes of things: and, surely, the *first* cause, the great maker of all, should be the first and chief object of enquiry. And, were we rightly disposed to seek him, we should soon find him. "He is not far from every one of us." We are surrounded with God. The heavens, the earth, the sea, display his glory. The whole world is a kind of looking-glass, in which his perfections are reflected; for "the invisible things of him, even his power and godhead, are clearly seen by the things that appear." But alas! "the world by wisdom knew not God:" and the reason was, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge; therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind,"—"they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator:" they even "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible men, yea, of four-footed beasts and creeping things." The better sort of the gods which the heathen adored, were, in general, patterns of abominable vices; and it is no

wonder that their worshippers imitated them, and mingled their devotions with the most execrable deeds. Hence it was that some of their wise men, sensible of the mischief of such a system, wished that the poets, who dressed up in fine language the stories and the vices of the gods, should be banished from the country, as the enemies of society.

In opposition to this wretched gang of deities, the knowledge of "the only true God" is here extolled. JEHOVAH is the only *true* God; all others are *false:* they are "vanity and lies." A principal design of divine Revelation was to maintain this great truth, —"There is ONE GOD, and there is *none other* but HE." Mark xii. 32. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Deut. vi. 4: and the Jewish nation had the honour, for many ages, of being the chief supporters of this great doctrine, amidst a world of blind idolaters. The sacred Scriptures which they possessed, and which were the treasury of this sacred truth, have been handed down to *us;* and we enjoy, in addition to them, the testimonies of the inspired apostles in the New Testament; and, above all, the testimony of the Son of God himself in our text, and in many other places. In the scriptures of truth we learn all that is necessary to be known of God. All his moral as well as his natural perfections are therein displayed. There we learn that he is ETERNAL, ALMIGHTY, OMNIPRESENT, HOLY, JUST, WISE, FAITHFUL, and GOOD. Blessed be God for these bright discoveries of his infinite perfections! It is life eternal to know thee, the only true God!

But, in our text, we find the knowledge of *Jesus Christ* is made of equal importance with the knowledge of *God;* which seems to imply that Jesus Christ is equal with God; and so indeed he is. At the first view of these words, some may think that the inferiority of our Saviour is intimated, for it is said—"This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the *only true God, and* Jesus Christ," &c. But

the title of "the *only true* God" is not intended to exclude the Son of God, but to exclude *idols*. Jehovah is the only true God, and idols are nothing; but as Jesus Christ is, in many places of the Scripture, declared to be the true God, the text cannot be understood as a denial of his Deity; but it is intended to shew that it is necessary to salvation, not only to know God as a *Creator*, but also as a *Saviour:* it is as necessary to know Jesus the Mediator, by whom we come to the Father, as it is to know the Father himself; and as we said before, thus rendering the knowledge of Christ as necessary to eternal life as the knowledge of God the Father, the text, instead of rejecting the divinity of Jesus, affords a powerful argument for it;—and here let it be observed, that the three names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are not intended to explain to us the manner in which the three divine persons subsist, for that is not revealed, nor could we comprehend it if it were; but they are the *office names* of the three divine persons in the Godhead; and express the characters they sustain in the covenant of grace; and these "Three are One"—three in person and in office, but one in nature and in essence.

The true divinity of our Saviour is strongly asserted in the following scripture:—John v. 22, 23, "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." And in the 20th chapter of St. John, verse the 28th, we find the apostle, St. Thomas, saying *to* Christ, "My Lord, and my God." St. Paul also charges the elders of Ephesus to "feed the church of God, which *he*" (that is, Christ) "purchased with his own blood." Acts xx. 28. Many more passages might be cited in proof of this doctrine, but we add only the following: Rom. ix. 5, "Of whom," that is, of the fathers, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." It is necessary to know the Son of God as described by those two names—JESUS

and CHRIST, as descriptive of his character and office. The name JESUS was given him to denote the great work of salvation which he came to perform: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS," said the angel to his mother, "for he shall *save* his people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21): for he came from Heaven on purpose to deliver his people from their iniquities by the sacrifice of himself, and by the power of his Spirit attending his word.

But, it may be asked by the anxious sinner, Is he appointed, and perfectly able to do this? Yes, he is, for he is CHRIST also, which name signifies *Anointed* in the Greek language, as *Messiah* does in the Hebrew. The name denotes his being fully qualified for the office, being anointed by the Holy Spirit, "full of grace and truth;" and as, in ancient times, kings, priests, and prophets were solemnly set apart to their several offices by being anointed, so Jesus Christ is divinely consecrated and authorized to perform the grand work of saving sinners; and this is further expressed by his being *Sent*—"Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent." Jesus Christ, though equal with the Father as touching his divine nature, condescends, in his human nature, and in his office of Mediator, to become "the servant of the Father;" and, in regard to that character, he was sent; he did not come without authority; he came with all the authority of Heaven, to accomplish the great design, determined upon in the councils of God, before the foundation of the world. To know Christ, therefore, is as necessary to salvation as to know the Father; he is as much the object of saving knowledge and of saving faith as the Father; and he is distinguished from him, not on account of any inferiority of nature, but on account of his office-character; and it may be remarked, that the same apostle, who records the words of the text, expressly says of Christ (1 John v. 21) "This is *the true God*, and eternal life." Our Lord himself also declares, that he himself is, equally with the Father, the object of

faith (John xiv. 1) "Ye believe in God, believe also in me"—that is, Ye have faith in God the Father, according to the discoveries of the Old Testament; have the same faith in me, his Son, the Saviour, according to the discoveries of the New Testament.

Let us now proceed, as we proposed, in the second place, to point out,

II. *The connection between the knowledge of the Father and of his Son, and the attainment of eternal life.*

And here let us pause a moment, and consider the import of the words—"*eternal life.*" This is the glorious blessing which the Son of God came from Heaven to procure for sinners, who deserve eternal death, and were justly doomed to it by the broken law of a righteous God." "The wages of sin is *death*" —not merely the death of the body, but that which may be called the Death of the Soul—complete and everlasting separation from God, who is the only fountain of life and happiness; and this is called (Rev. xxi. 8) "the *Second* Death;" this is that dreadful state which our Lord himself calls "everlasting punishment" — "everlasting fire" — "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." But, although the wages of sin be death, "the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. vi. 23.

Opposed then to eternal death, is that eternal life of which our text speaks; the foundation of which is laid in *justification of life*, as St. Paul terms it (Rom. v. 18), which includes both an exemption from the sentence of death, and a title, through the perfect righteousness of Christ, to the complete enjoyment of happiness in Heaven; for which blessed state every true Christian is prepared by the gift of the Holy Spirit, who, as an active principle of Spiritual life, is compared, by our Lord, to "a well of water springing up to everlasting life." What the

glories and happiness of that state will be, it doth not yet fully appear; but we know that they will consist, partly, in that knowledge of God in Christ which is here commenced; for "we shall see him as he is," and "know even as we are known."

Now, such is the importance of divine knowledge, that our text declares "it is eternal life"—it is so connected with it, that eternal life is not to be expected without it, but may be confidently hoped for as the result of it.

This will appear, if we consider that the knowledge of *ourselves*, in relation to God; conviction of sin; apprehension of danger; prayer to God for pardon; trusting in him, through Christ, for salvation; love to him; delight in him; hope in his mercy; and obedience to his will (all which are necessary in a christian), depend upon, and result from a knowledge of his true character; and, consequently, that gross ignorance of him, or great mistakes respecting him, must be extremely dangerous to the soul.

It is through the knowledge of God, as infinitely pure and holy, that we become *humble and penitent*. We see his infinite purity in the glass of his holy law; we discern our own deformity; "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes," as pious Job did. The heathens thought God to be "altogether like unto themselves," no wonder then that they were proud and wicked. Where ignorance of God prevails, there sin also prevails. The prophet Hosea, complaining of the people in his days, says, "there is no knowledge of God in the land," and he ascribes to this, the prevalence of "swearing, lying, stealing, adultery, and murder." Hosea, iv. 12. Where ignorance reigns, there Satan also reigns, for he is "the ruler of the darkness of this world," and wicked men are "under the power of darkness." Hence, when Jesus Christ commissioned Paul to go and preach the gospel to the heathen, it was for the purpose of "turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." It was igno-

rance of God that caused the Pharisee in the temple to boast; it was a true knowledge of him that humbled the publican, and constrained him to cry,—"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

It is through the knowledge of God in Christ, that we are led *to believe in him*. "They that know thy name," says the psalmist, "will trust in thee." We dare not, in any momentous affair, especially in a matter of life and death, confide in a stranger, a person of whose ability and integrity we have no knowledge. If our property, if our health, if our life be in danger, we are anxious to know whom we trust to defend us: how much more necessary is it to know HIM to whom we commit our immortal souls; to whose advocacy we leave our cause; on whose fidelity we repose, and who is the only foundation of our hopes of eternity. Our faith will certainly bear some proportion to our knowledge; if our knowledge be very imperfect, our faith will be weak. Abraham's acquaintance with the character of God, preserved him from distrust, even in the most trying circumstances; therefore, "he staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised (however contrary to nature) he was able to perform." Rom. iv. 20, 21. In like manner, the blessed apostle, St. Paul, in the prospect of martyrdom, says, "*I know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." 2 Tim. i. 12.

LOVE is another distinguishing disposition of the real christian, without which all pretensions to religion are vain: but how is it possible to love any person, however amiable he may be, if we are perfectly ignorant of his character? The knowledge of God and the love of God are inseparable; for St. John saith—"He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." It is the moral excellency of any person that renders him amiable in our esteem. Wis-

dom, justice, goodness, recommend a fellow-creature to our regard; but that regard must arise from some acquaintance with the person possessing these virtues, and it is heightened by our deriving personal advantage from his possession of them. In like manner, the glorious God presents himself to our view, in his works, and especially in his gospel, as infinite in power, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth; and, as exercising all these perfections, through the redemption that is in Christ, for us men and for our salvation; to deliver us from guilt and danger, to reinstate us in his favour and friendship, to render us happy in communion with him here, and most blessed for ever, at his own right hand, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore! Surely, such a being must appear to us infinitely worthy of our highest veneration, our most cordial affection, our most devoted obedience. But all this depends upon the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.

It is equally plain that the true and acceptable *worship of God* must depend on the right knowledge of him. "Ye worship ye know not what," said our Lord to the Samaritans; "we know what we worship," said he of the Jews, who derived their knowledge from the sacred Scriptures. More grossly ignorant than the Samaritans were the Greeks; for in their metropolis, in Athens, so famed for its wisdom, the apostle of the Gentiles beheld an altar with this inscription,—"To the unknown God."—Unknown, alas! in Athens! unknown by the learned and sagacious Greeks! so true it is, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." Neither Egypt, nor Greece, nor Rome, with all their improvements in science, arts, and arms, knew, or worshipped the true God. But Jehovah has revealed himself to us; he has also revealed to us the way and manner in which he may and will be worshipped; and "every one who hath heard and learned of the Father, comes to him by Jesus Christ;"—for no man cometh to the Father

but by him; and coming to him in this way, we must also worship him "in spirit and in truth," not with bodily service merely, nor merely with the best worded petitions, but with the heart; with sincerity, reverence, fervent desires, and humble hopes: all which imply the knowledge of God.

The great importance of the right knowledge of God having been sufficiently proved, there are some practical lessons of instruction which we may learn from the subject.

From hence we perceive in what a deplorable condition a great part of the world continues to this day. There are millions of our fellow-creatures who know not God; who, following the superstitions of their father, worship, if they worship at all, idols of their own making; while for the greater part, they are addicted to the grossest vices and the most cruel practices; walking, as St. Paul expresses it, "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." How devoutly is it to be wished that proper and effectual means may be taken, to dispel this dreadful darkness, and to communicate to them the saving knowledge of God!

More pitiable, because far more criminal, are those persons among ourselves in this land of vision, who know not God; for it may truly be said of many in this country, as St. Paul said of others in his day, "Some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame!" How many are wilfully and contentedly ignorant. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Unhappy creatures! their ignorance is their sin; yet their ignorance hides from them both their sin and their danger. "My people," said the Lord concerning Israel, "are destroyed for lack of knowledge;" and the same may be said of many who are called his people now: but let such persons know this, that

"the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire;" and when he comes, he will "take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Th. i. 7, 8. Let none then who live in this happy country, think that they shall be excused on account of their ignorance; for all have opportunity to read or hear the gospel; and to neglect the proper means of obtaining divine knowledge is to incur the displeasure of God; for "this is the condemnation," said the Saviour himself, "that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John iii. 19. O that such persons may resolve, by the grace of God, from this moment, earnestly to apply their hearts to wisdom; and, while they use the means, pray fervently to "the Father of lights" to make them wise to salvation!

Others among us have the greatest cause for thankfulness. Has he, who, in the first creation, "commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into your hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ?" O reflect on the greatness of the blessing! Christ congratulated his disciples on this account, saying, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see;" and he offered up praises, to his heavenly Father, that he had revealed to babes the great truths of the gospel, which the wise and the prudent had rejected. Let it be your constant care to let "your light shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father, who is in Heaven." If you have indeed been "taught of God," prove it, by "putting off the old man of sin," and by being "renewed in the spirit of your mind." For the true knowledge of God is always practical. We deceive ourselves if we pretend to know him, and yet persist in sin. The apostle John tells us, that "he who saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John ii. 4. On the

contrary, he who truly knows God, will love, and serve, and obey him. Thus the obedience of the young king Josiah is mentioned, by the Lord himself, as the evidence of the right knowledge of him: —"He judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well with him; was not this to know me? saith the Lord." Jer. xxii. 16. A right knowledge of Christ produces an imitation of him; "we behold his glory, and are changed into the same image;" we behold the glory of his holiness, meekness, humility, and self-denial; and we study to be holy, and meek, and humble, and self-denied, like him. This is the true knowledge of God: and if you possess this, in any measure, you have cause to be thankful. Then, indeed, may you glory in this—not that you are rich or mighty in the world, but that you know the Lord; that you are going on to know him better; and that the happy day may be expected, when, in the heavenly world, you shall "know even as you are known;" not see any longer "through a glass darkly, but face to face;" and learn, by blessed experience, the full meaning of the text—"This is eternal life, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent."—To whom, with the Holy Spirit, the one God of our salvation, be ascribed everlasting praises! Amen.

SERMON LXVII.

THE POWER OF GOD.

Genesis xvii, 1. I am the Almighty God.

IN attempting to display the divine perfections, it is natural to begin with that which first strikes the mind of man when he thinks of a God. Whoever believes that there is a God, must believe that he is a great and powerful being. When St. Paul says, that "the invisible things of God" are perceived by the works of his hands, he mentions particularly, "his eternal power." Rom. i. 20. We cannot conceive of a God without power; nor can we conceive rightly of Jehovah but as a God of *infinite* power; the *Almighty* God, as he is called in our text. By this name he revealed himself to Abraham, when he appeared to him to confirm the promise of a very numerous posterity; a thing that seemed unlikely if human appearances only had been consulted: but, to encourage his faith in the promise, he says, "I am the Almighty God." This was enough, Abraham was satisfied. He believed: he waited; and the promise was fulfilled. It will also greatly assist our faith, and promote our devotion, if we receive and retain a solemn conviction that

God is a being possessed of infinite power.

Let us trace the evidences of this truth.

1. In the original production of all creatures;
2. In the preservation and government of all creatures; and,
3. In the redemption of sinful man.

I. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." Heb. xi. 3. They were not merely *formed*, they were *created*—they were made out of nothing, the matter of which they were formed was created; for, "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. i. 1); and these two words, "the heaven and the earth," include all the countless myriads of creatures and things which fill the universe, and far exceed the ken of mortals. God alone can create. Men can build houses and ships, but they must have materials to build them with; but when God made the world, he found no materials to work with; he created the materials themselves, he made the matter of the heaven and the earth; he then *framed*, or curiously and perfectly wrought, that created matter into millions of beautiful forms; and, in the space of six days "the heavens and the earth were *finished*." Gen. ii. 1. All God's works are *finished* works; they will bear the closest inspection, and when most examined, will be most admired; they are the work of the Almighty God.

It is thus that he is distinguished from all false and pretended gods. "The idols of the heathen are vanity and lies, but the Lord made the heavens."—"For thus, said the Lord, that created the heavens, God himself that formed the earth, and made it; he hath established it; he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited; I am the Lord, and there is none else." Isa. xlv. 18. "The gods that have not made the heaven and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth; they are vanity and the work of errors." Jer. x. 11.

The limits of a short sermon will not admit of a

large description of the creation. We can refer but to few particulars. Observe the power of God in the *greatness* of some bodies, and in the *smallness* of others. The earth, which we inhabit, is eight thousand miles in diameter (or across); but what is this to the body of the sun, which is said to be a million of times larger than the earth, and ninety millions of miles distant from it? Some of the fixed stars are, perhaps, suns of other systems, and at such an immense distance, that it is supposed their light would be many thousands of years in reaching us, were it to travel with the velocity (or quickness) of a cannon ball.

The *smallness* of many creatures is as surprising as the greatness of others. There are living creatures so very small, that many thousands of them may be contained in the bulk of a single drop of water. These all proclaim, with a loud voice,—the almighty power of God; they constrain us to cry out, in the words of the prophet, "Ah, Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power, and there is nothing too hard for thee." Jer. x. 17. They oblige us also to exclaim, in the language of the Psalmist, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him!" Ps. viii. But this condescension of the Almighty God will perhaps appear more wonderful, when we consider, in the second place,

II. The power of God as it is displayed in the preservation and government of his creatures.

The whole system is preserved in its beautiful order by the same almighty hand which gave it being. "He upholds all things by the word of his power." The planets, those vast bodies, revolve in their appointed circuits with the most minute exactness, as is evident from the nicety with which eclipses and other wonders of the heavens are calculated. The earth, for instance, performs its annual revolution in three hundred and sixty-five days, five hours, and forty-nine minutes, never varying its course a single inch, nor its period a single moment. The moon

also faithfully attends the earth, and sweetly lessens the gloom of our tedious nights. The various seasons succeed each other in their appointed order; and, according to the divine promise, "summer and winter, seed-time, and harvest" continue to this day. The great and wide sea, whose billows roar and threaten to overwhelm the earth, is kept by the power of its Maker, within its proper limits! and "shall we not fear him who has placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?—and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail?—though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" Jer. v. 22.

Mark the display of the same almighty power in making constant provision for the vast family of the universe. All the innumerable tribes of beings which inhabit the air, the earth, and the water, "these all wait upon God, that he may give them their food in due season; that which he giveth them, they gather; he openeth his hand, they are filled with good." Ps. civ. 27.

The continuance, from age to age, of the various orders of animals, beasts, birds, fishes, insects; and all the multitudes of trees, plants, and flowers, must be ascribed to the same almighty power. How remarkable is the uniform proportion of males and females in the human race! and how kind the providence which multiplies the creatures useful to man, while lions and tigers, whales and sharks, are comparatively few!

The *moral* government of God is still more wonderful. To his power in restraining evil spirits we owe much of our safety and comfort. We are more sensible of his power in restraining wicked men. Bad as the world is, it would be infinitely worse, if God did not withhold bad men from their purposes; but all hearts are in his hand. He that restrains the raging waves of the sea, subdues also the madness of the people. "The floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves; but the Lord on high

is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." Ps. xciii. 3, 4.

The power of God was in ancient times most marvellously displayed in the miracles, which were wrought for wise and great purposes. He who gave laws to nature, can suspend or reverse them if he thinks fit. Once he permitted the waters to cover the whole earth, and drown its guilty inhabitants; again, he restrained the floods and caused them to retire. By a train of most wonderful works he rescued Israel from the yoke of Egypt, formed a path for them through the Red Sea, and sustained them for forty years in the wilderness. When he commands waters shall not drown, fire shall not consume, lions shall not devour. The miracles of Christ exceeded all others, for he was power itself in a human form. "The blind received their sight, and the lame walked; the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard; the dead were raised up, and to the poor the gospel was preached." Matt. xi. 5. Now in that gospel so confirmed, we shall find the grandest displays of divine power, and those in which we are most concerned. We proceed then, in the third place, to consider,

III. The power of God as it shines in the redemption of sinful men by Jesus Christ.

Observe this power in the person of the great Redeemer. The production of his human nature, in the womb of the Virgin, is ascribed (Luke i. 45) "to the power of the Highest," that is, of the Holy Spirit; in consequence of which, though he "was made of a woman," and made "in the likeness of sinful flesh," his nature was without sin, and "that holy thing" which was born, was the pure and immaculate Son of God. Wonderful was the power which preserved him from his cruel and implacable enemies, for he constantly endured the opposition of men and devils; nor could any of his adversaries prevail against him, till "his hour was come;" that appointed hour when,

"according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," with "wicked hands" they crucified "the Lord of glory." Nor could death itself detain "the Lord of life;" he burst asunder the bars of the grave, and by his resurrection, more than by all that went before, "he was declared to be the Son of God with power."

When we consider the first planting of our holy religion in the world, by instruments so feeble, and notwithstanding obstacles so great, we shall see with what propriety the gospel is said to be "the power of God unto salvation." The apostles were plain men, who had been under the instruction of Christ for three or four years, and were well qualified to teach mankind; but they had not the sanction of learning, the eloquence of orators, nor the authority of the magistrate. They had to encounter the deeply rooted prejudices of the Jews; the superstition, idolatry, hatred, and vices of the heathen; the customs of the world, the laws of nations, and the interests of priests, aided by all the malice, cunning, and cruelty of the great destroyer, whose kingdom and influence among men the gospel was intended to subvert. But they went forth in the name of Jesus, filled with his love, inspired by his Spirit, animated by his promise, and the weapons of their warfare, altogether spiritual, became "mighty, through God, to destroy the strongest holds of the devils;" even in Jerusalem, where Christ was crucified, many thousands were converted to him. In Cæsarea, in Antioch, in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Alexandria, and even in Rome, Christian churches were formed; the altars of the idols were abandoned; and the gospel triumphed over millions of souls!

But it concerns us most of all to trace the effects of divine power in the application of the gospel to the heart, without which, its publication to the world, and its preservation to this day, will not avail to our personal salvation.

The gospel is designed to produce a great inward

change. The corruption of our nature renders this change absolutely necessary; and it is a change so considerable, as to be called in Scripture "a New Creation;" this, of course, can be effected only by the power of God, and therefore, true converts are said to be made "willing in the day of his power." Ps. cx. 3. The mind of man, in his natural state, is in darkness, unacquainted with the way of salvation through faith in Christ, and frequently contentedly ignorant, yea, wilfully ignorant; for there is an unhappy aversion to the truth, a strong prejudice against it, insomuch that many persons "love darkness rather than light." There is a strange dislike to private religion—the reading of the Bible and prayer; while in some persons there is a strong attachment to vanity, to gaiety, to amusements; in others, vicious habits are formed, and wilful sins indulged. Some are profane, and venture without fear of the threatened punishment, to take the holy name of God in vain, perhaps to utter curses on themselves or others. Some, in open defiance of divine authority, instead of remembering the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, turn their backs on their Maker, and prove that they love him not, by preferring their pleasures to his service and worship, to the utter neglect of their souls and salvation. Others launch out still further into the ocean of Vice, and plunge themselves into guilty pleasures and filthy vices, to which God has annexed everlasting punishment. The multitude among us, it may be feared, forget God; they live without God in the world; and their hearts are as far from him as those of the Pagans themselves.

Taking this view of things, we are ready to say, as in the prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" Can these careless souls become diligent disciples of Christ? Can their love of vanity be cured? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Can the habits of profaneness, of drunkenness, of uncleanness, be subdued? Can these vain and worldly people be so changed, that they may

love what once they hated, and hate what once they loved? Can they become pure, pious, spiritual, humble, zealous followers of the Lamb? Can they be induced to resist the claims of self-interest, and endure the scornful smile, the harsh insults, and the cruel mockings of gay companions and displeased relations?—Yes. All this has been done, and may be done again. What! if it be impossible with men? All things are possible with God. "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." 2 Cor. iv. 6. And the gospel, attended by the energy of the Holy Spirit, "casts down imaginations (or reasonings) and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. x. 5.

"But," it may be asked by a penitent sinner, "can an offender so guilty and vile be pardoned, and received into the divine favour? Can crimes like mine be blotted out, and remembered no more?" Yes. The Son of man when on earth had power to forgive sins: nor has he less power in heaven; he has power to give eternal life to all who are given to him; and as he never rejected a penitent sinner when he lived among men, neither will he now; for "he is exalted to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins," and he has graciously said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out."

One exertion more of divine power let us contemplate. When Moses saw a bush on fire, and yet it was not consumed, he turned aside to behold it with admiration. In that burning bush he beheld the emblem of Israel afflicted in Egypt, yet not destroyed; and we may perceive in it an emblem of a true Christian "kept by the power of God, through faith to salvation." And what but the power of God is sufficient for this purpose? If you consider what a dangerous world we live in, where iniquity abounds, where prosperity presents a thousand snares,

and adversity a thousand temptations; when you remember that Satan, "like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour:" and, above all, when you recollect that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," you will rejoice to think that the great and good shepherd of the flock hath said of his sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." In that almighty hand the believer is safe; "he is able to keep us from falling;" to "keep what we have committed to his care;" to support us under all the trials of life; to comfort our souls in the article of death; and to complete the whole redemption at the last day—when "he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. iii. 21.

What then shall we say to these things? What use shall we make of our meditations on the almighty power of God? Let him be adored; let him be feared; let him be trusted.

Let him be adored. He, and he alone, is the proper object of religious worship. Observe and admire his power wherever you see it; and where can you look without seeing it? Wisdom and power among men command our respect; we reverence the wise and the mighty; and shall we not reverence and adore *Him*, who is infinite in wisdom and almighty in power? We admire the princes of this world, mortal as they are, who command numerous armies, govern extensive empires, conquer powerful enemies, and preserve their own people in peace; should we not then admire and adore the Lord of Hosts, who rules among the armies of heaven, and over the inhabitants of the earth; whose wisdom none can fathom, whose power none can resist? Yes, "Him shall you worship, and to him shall you do sacri-

fice." Adore and praise him, and say, with the heavenly worshippers who bow before his throne, and cast their crowns at his feet, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created." Rev. iv. 11.

Let this Almighty God be feared. Fear not man, who can do nothing but as permitted. "Fear not man," said our Saviour, "but I will forwarn you whom you shall fear, fear him who, after he hath killed the body, can cast both body and soul into hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him." O the folly and madness that possesses the hearts of men, who dare rebel against him, break his commandments, abuse his goodness, defy his anger, and neglect his salvation! The almighty power of God renders the thoughts of his being our enemy insupportably terrible. He who has "revealed his wrath against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men," is able, at any time, and by any means, to execute his threatenings; for "he is strong that executeth his word." If he is pleased to give commission to thunders and lightenings, to storms and tempests, to earthquakes or plagues, floods and fires, to destroy his enemies, who can "stay his hand," or restrain his power? Ah! "who ever hardened his heart against him and prospered?" "Consider this, then, ye that forget God, lest he tear you to pieces, and there be none to deliver." "Set not the briars and thorns against him in battle, lest he go through them, and burn them together; but take hold of his strength, and make peace with him." Say, poor sinner, "Can thine heart endure, and thine hands be strong, when he shall deal with thee?" or, "Is there any that can deliver out of his hand?" Be wise now therefore; be instructed. Submit at once; and seek his pardoning mercy through Christ, "lest you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." But, finally,

"*Blessed are they that put their trust in him.*" Yes, "trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." What cannot he do, who is almighty? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Imitate the faith of Abraham, who could confide in the power of God, when probabilities were all against him, "being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." Thus the noble confessors in Daniel's time were courageous for Jehovah, being assured that the God whom they served was able to preserve them, even in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Our faith should bear some proportion to the object of it. How inconsistent is a strong God and weak faith! When our Saviour was about to exert his miraculous power in healing, he proposed this question, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" So should we ask ourselves when we desire any thing from God. Do I believe that God is able to fulfil my request? Faith will be feeble, and prayer will be lifeless, if the power of God be forgotten; and be encouraged by reflecting that the exercise of almighty power is entrusted to the hands of Jesus Christ. He has "all power in heaven and in earth;" he is therefore "able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him." His blood is so efficacious, that it can cleanse from the utmost possible degree of guilt; his grace so powerful, that it can rescue from the utmost power of sin; he can save to the utmost extent of our wishes and capacities, to the utmost period of life; yea, he can and will continue to bless his people to the most distant ages of eternity. Be not, therefore, afraid to trust him. Venture on him; he is the rock of ages. Cast your souls, your sins, your burdens on the Saviour. "Trust in him at all times, ye people." "What time you are afraid, trust in him." "Seek unto God, and to God commit your cause; for he doeth great things, and unsearchable; marvellous things without number."

Job. v. 8, 9. "In every thing, by prayer and supplication, make known your requests unto him," encouraged by this declaration, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

SERMON LXVIII.

THE WISDOM OF GOD.

Romans xvi. 27. To God, only Wise, be glory through Jesus Christ, Amen.

WITH these words the apostle Paul concludes his most admirable and useful epistle to the Romans. Having expressed his good will towards the Christians then living in the city of Rome, he prays for the establishment of the gospel among them; for which gospel he ascribes glory to that infinitely wise God, who is the Author of the gospel, through Jesus Christ his Son, the great preacher and the great subject of it. "To God, *only wise*, be glory."

Our present business is to explain and improve the following truth:—

GOD IS A BEING POSSESSED OF INFINITE WISDOM.

Wisdom, in man, is that attainment of his mind whereby he is enabled to regulate all his actions in the best manner; to choose the best object, and to pursue it by the best means. It is the application of good knowledge to good purposes: it is acting according to a correct judgment; for there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge resides in the understanding; but wisdom relates to practice. Knowledge is therefore the foundation of wisdom. A man may have knowledge without wisdom; but he cannot have wisdom with-

out knowledge, for wisdom is the right use of knowledge.

But knowledge and wisdom in the blessed God are inseparable. St. Paul puts them together, when he cries—"O the depth of the riches both of the *wisdom and knowledge* of God!" Rom. xi. 33. His knowledge is infinite. "Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite." Ps. cxlvii. 5. God knows *himself*, and he *only* knows himself perfectly, for he only is infinite. He also knows all other things, whether they be past, or present, or to come. His judgment of all things is perfectly correct, and this regulates all his operations. He directs all things to their proper end, the end for which he gave them being; and this is his own glory: for, as he is the most excellent being, nothing can be so excellent an end as his own glory; and his wisdom so directs all beings and all occurrences, that this end shall be fully and finally accomplished. "*For* OF HIM, *and* THROUGH HIM, *and* TO HIM, *are all things: to whom be glory for ever.* Amen." Rom. xi. 36.

In our text God is termed "ONLY WISE;" and in another place he is called "*The only wise God;*" for God alone is perfectly, universally, and constantly wise. In very ancient times, men distinguished by superior learning and knowledge were called *Sophoi*, that is, *wise;* but Pythagoras and Socrates, two of the most eminent of them, thought this too high a title to be given to any but God; and from that time they were known by the more modest name of *lovers of wisdom* (*Philo-Sophoi*) or Philosophers. Wisdom is indeed "The divine Royalty." Strictly speaking, it belongs to God alone. As "there is none *good* but one, that is, God;" so there is none *wise* but him. Men have often boasted of their wisdom; but "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God;" and "he knoweth the reasonings of men that they are vain," especially when they are opposed to his gospel; and, on the other hand,

"the foolishness of God," that is, the gospel of Christ, profanely so called by some, is "wiser than men"—far wiser than any of the schemes devised by the *wit* of man. 1 Cor. i. 25; and iii. 19.

But we need not confirm this truth by referring to many other Scripture proofs, for it is what every man must admit; we shall rather shew, in a few select instances, wherein the widom of God is displayed.

I. It is natural, in the first place, to refer to *the works of God* which our eyes behold; and the slightest observation of their nature and design will constrain us to say, "In wisdom hast thou made them all!"

Observe their *variety*, and say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, how *manifold* are thy works!" From the same original matter the infinitely wise God has produced a vast variety of creatures and things. "Let the earth," said he, "bring forth grass, the herb, and the fruit-tree; and it was so." And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowls that may fly above the earth: let the earth bring forth cattle, beasts, and creeping things. And God said, Let us make man; and God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." Gen. i. How different are the forms, the qualities, the colours, and the uses of the creatures of God! How numerous are the heavenly bodies; the inhabitants of the earth, of the air, and of the water: they all differ in their structure; but they all display the wonderful wisdom of their great Creator: a wisdom we cannot comprehend, "for no man can find out the work that God maketh, from the beginning to the end." Eccles. iii. 11.

The remarkable *fitness* of every thing which God has made, for its intended purpose, is another proof of his wisdom. It is impossible not to see the most evident marks of design and contrivance in the works of God. Every thing has its proper use, and every

thing is perfectly adapted to that use. He hath formed the sun to give us light by day, and the moon by night; he causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth." That every tree and plant should produce its distinct and proper seed, to perpetuate the same species for future years, is an admirable provision of divine wisdom. "The sea also is his"—"the great and wide sea, wherein are creatures innumerable." "There go the ships," which render the sea the medium of union among the most distant nations, although it seems to separate one country from another; for, by navigation and commerce, the productions of different countries become a common stock, and wonderfully increase the comforts of man, while it employs the skill and industry of multitudes, facilitates friendly intercourse, and extends knowledge, especially that best kind of knowledge, the gospel of Christ, which is "the wisdom of God."

The changing seasons of the year are a wise and gracious appointment of Heaven, and are far more grateful than a constant sameness. The frost of winter destroys noxious insects and weeds, braces the human body, and prepares the soil for a new crop. The returning spring renews the face of the earth, and inspires the heart of man with cheerfulness and pleasure. The warmth of summer ripens the succeeding productions of the garden and the field; and the autumn crowns the year with fruit and corn to reward the care and toil of the husbandman. The succession of night and day is pleasant and useful to man; he welcomes the day as the proper season of labour, and the night is no less welcome as the season of rest. All *night* would be intolerable, and all *day* would be extremely inconvenient. "The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun; thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter." Ps. lxxiv. 16, 17.

The bodies of animals and all other living creatures display the wisdom of God in a most wonderful manner. Some are formed to live in the water, an element that would destroy others. Birds are furnished with wings to soar aloft in the air; some animals live beneath the surface of the gound; but they all have organs suited to their destination; proper food is provided for their support, and they have sagacity to find it, and stomachs fitted to digest it. All this proceedeth from him who is excellent in counsel and wonderful in working.

The human frame is itself a world of wonders. Consider some of its parts. The bones are so firm that they support the whole body, yet so flexible that we can perform a vast variety of motions. The muscles, which are more than four hundred in number, have all their particular uses, yet never interfere with each other. The eye is an organ of such astonishing contrivance, that anatomists have called it "a sure cure for Atheism." The ear is no less wonderfully adapted to its office; its mechanism is extremely simple, but the variety of its effects is remarkably great. The process of digestion is surprising; the power of the stomach and other organs to turn so many different substances into chyle and blood, and thus to nourish life for many years, is truly amazing. The circulation of the blood is equally admirable. The heart has the power of forcing the blood into the arteries, and receiving it back from the veins, after it has visited the most distant and minute parts of the system; for this purpose it contracts and dilates its muscles, four thousand times in every hour, making one hundred thousand strokes every twenty-four hours; and continuing to do this, without weariness or disorder, for seventy or eighty years together. This wonderful machine is, generally speaking, kept in perfect order; for health requires the exact performance of every function. Little do we consider how much must go to produce the ease we generally enjoy. We need not wonder if at any

time we are unwell; but, knowing the complicated machine of the body, we may wonder at a single hour's comfort and activity. Well may each of us say with the prophet, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."

2. The wisdom of God is no less apparent in the work of Providence than in that of Creation. It requires the same skill to govern the world as to make it. The order and harmony of the Universe can be ascribed only to the constant influence of the eternal mind; without which neither an empire rises, nor a sparrow falls. The world is like a vast machine, in which there are many millions of movements, some of which, to our mistaken view, seem to contradict each other; but, by the wisdom of the great Artificer, they all concur to accomplish his design, and to promote his glory.

But it is to MAN, and to man *as a fallen creature*, that we should chiefly direct our attention. How remarkable is the wisdom of God in conferring upon men those different abilities and inclinations, which tend to the general welfare of society! How wonderful is the restraint which he lays upon the wicked, without which, their ungoverned appetites and ferocious tempers would deluge the earth with misery and blood! but "he stilleth the noise of the waves, and the raging of the people."

The wisdom of God is frequently conspicuous in effecting the most grand and glorious designs by weak and feeble means, and even by the bad dispositions of men.

The envy and cruelty of Joseph's brethren, led the way to his advancement in Egypt, as did also the wickedness of Potiphar's wife. God turned the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness; so that what was proposed for the destruction of David, became the means of his safety. The luxury of some of the rich, provides labour and food for the poor; and

the worst of human actions give occasion to the enactment of the most excellent laws. Persecution itself, the vilest effort of human depravity, tends to the promotion of the gospel, and "the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church." Thus, even "the wrath of man is made to praise him, and the remainder thereof he is pleased to restrain."

3. But the wisdom of God is most of all illustrated in the grand affair of Human REDEMPTION; other discoveries of it, however excellent, are as the dawning light of the morning, compared with that of the meridian sun, shining in its brightest splendor.

To restrain or lessen human evils, and render them tolerable, is no small effort of the wisdom of man; but the wisdom of God has brought out of greatest possible evil, the greatest possible good. He has made the apostacy of angels, the malice of devils, and the rebellion of man, the occasion of exhibiting all his glorious perfections, and especially his wisdom, to the utmost advantage. Nothing in all the world can be so evil, so detestable as sin; nothing so hurtful and horrible as its effects: and yet it has given occasion for the manifestation of divine wisdom, holiness, justice, patience, and mercy, beyond what we can conceive would have been possible, had not sin entered into the world.

Here then is the "hidden wisdom of God;" wisdom which the light of nature could never have discovered; and which our feeble intellect so imperfectly comprehends, that it still remains "the wisdom of God in a mystery." 1 Tim. i. 17; and 1 Cor. ii. 7. It is "the manifold wisdom of God"—displayed, not in a single act, but in a variety of counsels; the union of the most excellent ends and of the most excellent means. "He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence:"—wisdom in the contrivance, and prudence in the execution of the plan.

Nothing less than wisdom truly divine could

have found out an expedient whereby "Mercy and truth" (apparently contrary to each other) "should meet together; righteousness and peace," equally hostile to each other, "should meet and embrace." The claims of justice and of mercy are so opposite, that human wisdom could never have reconciled them. We may suppose justice to plead in the following manner:—"Dread Majesty of Heaven, I arraign, before thy awful tribunal, the rebel man. Made in thy image, richly favoured by thy blessings, placed under a law, easy, righteous, and reasonable, —bound by ten thousand ties to love and serve thee, he has listened to the tempter, wilfully transgressed thy commandments, dishonoured thy government, and filled thy whole creation with folly, and sin, and woe. I demand his life. It is forfeited. He well deserves to die: and die he *must*; or what becomes of thy truth, which declared he *should* die? What becomes of thy holiness, should he not die? What world of thine will hereafter believe that thou art holy, or just, or true? I demand therefore that he die."

But Mercy, smiling, appears. "I too," saith she, "have my plea to offer. It is true, man hath sinned, and deserves to die. But is there no room for the exercise of pity and compassion? Justice is already displayed in the punishment of fallen angels; let that suffice. Permit mercy also to be exhibited to the universe. Now there is an admirable opportunity for it, for without misery there can be no mercy. Shew pity, then, to miserable man. Shall devils for ever triumph? Shall they boast that, by one daring stroke, they have spoiled the six days labour of a God; and this fair globe, adorned with a profusion of thy choicest gifts, become a mere wilderness of woe, a charnel-house of destruction, and nothing more than the porch of hell? O listen to Mercy, and let the rebel sinner live!"

Now who can adjust these jarring claims? If one be gratified, it must be at the expence of the other:

If man must perish, what becomes of mercy? If man be pardoned, what becomes of justice?

Only the wisdom of God can devise a satisfactory expedient. The wisdom of God saith, "I will satisfy you both. The pleas of justice shall be satisfied in the punishment of sin; and the pleas of mercy shall be satisfied in the pardon of sin. Justice shall not complain for want of punishment; nor mercy for want of compassion. I will provide a sacrifice which shall satisfy Justice; and the virtue of that sacrifice shall gratify Mercy. Justice shall have punishment to accept, and Mercy shall have pardon to bestow. The rights of both shall be secured; and the demands of both shall amicably accord in punishment and pardon, by transferring the punishment of the sinner to his Surety. Justice shall exact a recompense from his blood, while life and salvation shall be granted by Mercy to the sinner, without the expence of one drop of his own." Behold, therefore, the goodness and the severity of God! The riches of grace are entwined with the terrors of wrath. God is righteous without being cruel, and merciful without being unjust. His righteousness inviolate, and the world recovered*.

How marvellous is the wisdom of God in the provision of a SAVIOUR in the person of his SON, Jesus Christ? Who so proper to restore the world as he who made it? Who so qualified to renew the divine image, as he who first impressed it? Who is so fit to intercede with God, as his dearly beloved Son? Who so proper to redeem the forfeited inheritance as the "Heir of all things?"

The union of the two natures, human and divine, in the person of Christ, appears to be admirably adapted to the great purpose designed. He is "Immanuel—God with us;" he was therefore qualified, as an umpire, to lay his hand upon both parties. By the one

* These thoughts, with many others in the course of these Sermons, are borrowed from the admirable CHARNOCK on the Attributes of God. See particularly vol. i. page 383, &c.

nature, he was fitted for "things pertaining to God," by the other, he was capable of sympathizing with men. He had a nature capable of suffering and a nature which could render his sufferings infinitely meritorious. Had he not been man, he could not have suffered and died; had he not been more than man, his sufferings and death would have been of no avail.

In the death of Christ we behold the righteousness of the law perfectly fulfilled (Rom. viii. 3); so that, "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, by the obedience of one, many were made righteous." And in this way, God manifested to the world, in one act, the strongest hatred to sin, and the greatest love to the sinner. Here is infinite love and infinite hatred condemning with awful severity the sin to what it deserved, and advancing the sinner himself to undeserved, unexpected, and everlasting happiness; consuming the sin, and recovering the sinner; and doing all this by instruments who had no such intention. Satan is overthrown by his own hands; he that had "the power of death" is himself destroyed "by death;" by his cross, Jesus wrests the crown of dominion from the prince of darkness: Satan is altogether baffled, and the agents he inspired to effect his plans are completely disappointed. It was "by wicked hands, that Jesus was crucified and slain;" but thus "the counsel and foreknowledge of God were fulfilled," and the church of God ransomed by the blood of his Son.

Nor is the wisdom of God less conspicuous in the ways and means by which the redemption of Christ is applied to the hearts of men. How simple and plain is that glorious gospel, which is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth! The great salvation was not published by men famous for wordly wisdom; it was not by the force of human eloquence, or by the influence of human authority, that men were converted; but "this treasure was put into earthen vessels, that the excellency of

the power might plainly appear to be of God, and not of man." For the same reason, Faith is appointed to be the instrument of our justification; for Faith assumes no merit of its own; it simply and humbly receives the divine testimony, and with it the blessings promised, "without money and without price;" and "therefore it is of faith, that it may be by grace."

The wisdom of God has adapted the gospel to promote, in the most powerful manner, the practice of holiness and good works. While a salvation of pure grace is bestowed upon men, and becomes the ground of their confidence and the source of their hopes, they are powerfully induced and enabled to glorify God by their holy obedience. A true acquaintance with the gospel produces in the heart love both to God and men. Nothing is so powerful as love; and the love of God to us, if "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," must and will effect a return of love and gratitude to God; and if we love him, we shall keep his commandments, for this is the proper fruit of faith, and the best evidence of our sincerity.

CONCLUSION.

Let us improve the subject in three ways:—*Adore the wisdom of God—Rely on the wisdom of God,*—and, *Implore wisdom of God.*

1. *Adore the wisdom of God.* Where can you turn your eyes without beholding it? Behold it in every object around you. Look at creation with this design, that the Creator, infinitely wise and good, may be adored. Thus shall "the whole world become a temple, and life itself be one continued act of adoration." But it is in "the new creation" that wisdom most brightly shines: it is "through Jesus Christ," as the text expresses it; through him, as the light of the world, God shines upon us; and through him as our Mediator, let our honours be paid to God.

2. *Rely on the wisdom of God.* In the common affairs of life we have frequent occasion for advice;

and we gladly avail ourselves of the wisdom of a friend, of a physician, of a counsellor: but O! what a privilege is it to a Christian, that the God of wisdom presides over the world, over the church, and over his private affairs! Commit then thy way to the Lord. Trust in him at all times, even at the worst of times. He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation: he knows how to make all things work together for good. "The Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." Finally,

3. *Ask wisdom of God;* so he directs us to do. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God—and it shall be given him." We need wisdom in all our concerns, and should seek direction in the management of all our affairs; but chiefly, we need it for our souls; for mistakes in religion are of all others the most dangerous. God has favoured us with the Bible, which is his own book of wisdom, and it is able to make us "wise unto salvation;" but we also need "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation" to guide us into all truth, and to glorify Jesus, by revealing him to us as the way, the truth, and the life.—May we know, and love, and serve him on earth! daily increasing in true wisdom, and rejoicing in hope of a superior state, where our faculties shall be enlarged, and our knowledge improved; and where, with infinite gratitude, we shall adopt the doxology in our text:—*To God, only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ.* Amen.

SERMON LXIX.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Isaiah vi. 3. Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.

ALL the divine attributes are equally necessary to the perfection of his nature; and it may be improper to exalt any one of them above the rest: but it may be remarked, that no attribute of God is expressed in scripture as his holiness is—no attribute is so awfully proclaimed:—it is thrice repeated in a single sentence, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." We find this doxology in the account of a most remarkable vision, which Isaiah, the prophet, saw. "I saw the Lord," saith he, "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the Seraphim;—and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." This is applied to Jesus Christ, in the gospel of St. John, where it is written, "These things said Esaias when he saw his glory, and spake of him." John xii. 41. We find another doxology of a similar kind, in Rev. iv. 8; where celestial beings are represented as giving glory to God, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." From these, and many other texts of Scripture, we learn a great and important doctrine, which we shall endeavour to illustrate and improve; namely, that

The great God is infinitely pure and holy.

By holiness, in the blessed God, we mean, that essential rectitude of his nature, whereby he takes infinite delight and pleasure in that which is pure and holy, and hates, with a perfect hatred, every thing which is morally evil.

We consider holiness as essential, or absolutely necessary, to the very being and existence of God. We can have no right conception of a God without holiness. A God without holiness would be like a God without power, or a God without wisdom—it would be a monster, not a God. Many of the idols or pretended gods of the heathens, were indeed unholy; they were abominably impure; the patterns and the patrons of detestable vices; and therefore it is said in the song of Moses—"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?—who is like unto thee—*glorious in holiness?*" The holiness of God is the glory of God; it is the glory of all his other perfections,—of his power; hence we read of "his holy arm,"—of his truth; hence we read of "his holy promise,"—of his justice; for he is righteous in all "his ways, and holy in all his works." We say therefore that God is essentially holy; and it would be less absurd to say, There is no God, than to say, God is not holy.

Holiness is *originally* in God. If angels are holy, God made them so. If believers are holy, God made them so. But the holiness of God is not derived; it was eternally, originally, and unchangeably in him. Some of the holy angels sinned, and are become devils. Man, who was made holy at first, is now become an impure sinner; and the holiest creatures in the world, if left to themselves, might become unholy: but God is eternally holy; there is "no variableness with him, neither shadow of turning."

Let us now produce some evidence of this truth—some satisfactory proof that God is holy. And we may easily obtain this from the uniform testimony of the sacred Scriptures—from the original condition of all rational creatures—from the holy

law which God has given to men—from the anger he has manifested against unholy sinners—from the atonement made for sin by the death of Christ—and from the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of believers.

1. The holiness of God appears from the positive, uniform, repeated testimony of the sacred writers, in the Scriptures of truth. The great God himself, in whose light alone we see light, asserts his own character, and proclaims his own name. "I, the Lord your God, am holy." "I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour." This is ever the sanction of his holy commandments,—"Be ye holy, for I am holy." We need not multiply texts; the holy writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit himself, concur with the Seraphim in the text,—"One of whom cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory;" and observe, so awfully, so loudly was this proclamation made, that "the posts of the door," or the massy pillars of the temple, "moved at the voice of him that cried;" while the holy prophet himself trembled, and said, "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts;"—that is, the holy "WORD," who was afterwards "made flesh, and dwelt among us." Such will ever be the humbling effect of right views of the holiness of God!

2. We refer to the original state of all rational and immortal beings. When formed by him they were holy; for nothing morally evil could proceed from the pure hands of a holy God. The innumerable hosts of angels were created pure. Those who still retain their first estate are called "the holy angels;" and those who fell were originally such. As to man, before his creation, "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," and accordingly—"God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him." Gen. i. 26, 27.

It is no impeachment of the holiness of God, that he permitted his creatures to fall. All creatures are in their very nature changeable. God only is incapable of change. But though "God made man upright," yet he was capable of "seeking out many inventions." He was able to stand, yet capable of falling. He was created with a will perfectly free; he was capable of loving God and keeping his commandments; there was a light in his understanding, rectitude in his heart, a rule to act by,—a promise to encourage him to obedience, and a threatening to deter him from sin. More was not necessary; his defection must be charged on himself: God is holy.

3. Consider the nature of the law, originally given to man in Paradise, and, long after, renewed at Sinai.

The substance of the eternal, unchangeable law of God is—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Less than this, a holy God cannot demand; less than this a holy creature cannot desire. The holiness of God was strongly expressed in the method which he took to secure the holiness of Adam, and in him, the holiness of all his posterity. What could have been a stronger inducement to obedience, than the hope of everlasting happiness for himself and all mankind? What a more powerful guard against sin, than the certain and eternal ruin of himself and all his race?

"The law," renewed, and awfully published at Sinai, "is holy, and just, and good." It is the rule of holiness. By this we learn what is holy or unholy, especially when we learn that it "is spiritual,"—that it reaches to the secret thoughts of the heart, and condemns even an evil desire. Thus, St. Paul assures us that he was convinced of sin, "because the law hath said, Thou shalt not covet." This obliged him to cry, "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal." "The law entered that the offence might abound"—that men might be convinced how dreadfully their sins have abounded;—"and thus," saith he, "sin

slew me," and " I died:"—" it was made death unto me, and sin, by the commandment, became exceeding sinful." See Romans vii. 9—14. Surely, this holy law—which is called perfect—pure—clean, and " righteous," and armed with a dreadful curse against every transgressor, is an awful proof that God is holy. So, however, Moses, the man of God, thought, when witnessing the fire, and tempest, and terrible voice which attended the giving of the law at Sinai: he said, " I exceedingly fear and quake; and thus every man will think who is acquainted with the extent of its demands, and sensible of his own innumerable transgressions.

4. Let us take a view of the holiness of God, as awfully displayed in his anger against sin and sinners.

The first display of this was, in the expulsion of rebel angels from their thrones of glory. " God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment"—they " kept not their first estate," and were therefore expelled from " their own habitation." What a dreadful proof do those once illustrious, and now degraded spirits, exhibit to the whole spiritual world, of God's unconquerable and everlasting aversion to sin!

And see, with horror and surprise, man seduced by the devil, involved in the same condemnation. Well might Adam tremble at the sound of the once delightful voice of his Maker, when he approached, and cried, " Adam, where art thou?" " What is this that thou hast done?" and still more, when dragged from his vain refuge, and in spite of his vain excuses, he hears the holy offended God say—" Cursed is the serpent"—" cursed is the ground;" yet, not altogether cursed is poor apostate man: he is doomed indeed, to severe labour and toils; and the penurious earth refuses to afford him bread, but at the expense of the sweat of his brow; the deluded woman also, first in the transgression, is doomed to be the subject of multiplied sorrows, pains, and infirmities.

When men were greatly increased, and sin became universal and triumphant, we see the holy God so provoked, that "it repented him he had made man, and it grieved him at the heart;" "he looked on the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way;" "then were the windows of heaven opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the waters prevailed exceedingly, and every living substance was destroyed in which was the breath of life. Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." What a dreadful proof was this that the holy God was angry with the wicked!

Remember the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Their sin was very grievous,—their cry was great;" and their crimes so general, that not ten righteous men could be found. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire, from the Lord out of Heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the cities; and the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Gen. xix. 24. But he delivered righteous Lot.

When the Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquities, he punished them with the sword of Joshua, and expelled them from their fruitful land, which flowed with milk and honey.

And when the children of Israel, though God's peculiar people, forgot their duty to him, indulged in vice, or forsook his worship, he delivered them into the hands of the Philistines or of the Assyrians; and at one time consigned them to captivity for seventy years in Babylon; and at length, when they crucified the Lord of glory, rejected his gospel, and forbad it to be preached to the Gentiles, he brought upon them the fury of the Romans, burnt their temple, destroyed their city, and dispersed them, the most miserable of mankind, among all the nations of the earth. Every Jew you see may remind you that God is holy.

Mark also, how this holy Lord God has chastised

some of his dear children, eminent saints, when they have indulged unholy tempers, or committed unholy actions. Moses, who spake unadvisedly with his lips, was not permitted to enter the goodly land he longed for. Jonah, when he deserted his duty, was imprisoned in the whale's belly: and David, when he fell into some gross sins, was severely visited, and the bloody sword was entailed upon his family. The holy God hates sin wherever he sees it, but most of all when he sees it in his children; as a gardener hates a weed the more, when he finds it in a bed of his choicest flowers. God is indeed reconciled to the sinner who believes, but he is never reconciled to his sins; he loves his person, but he hates his vices. Surely, then, believers should avoid even the appearance of evil, for they serve a holy God.

5. But we must visit Calvary, if we would behold at once the most awful, and the most engaging display of the divine holiness. "Not all the vials of judgments which were ever poured out on a guilty world, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against rebellious devils, nor the groans of damned sinners, afford such a demonstration of God's hatred to sin, as the sufferings of Christ on the accursed tree." It was because he was infinitely displeased with sin, that "the Lord was pleased to bruise his Son, and put him to grief." It was holiness that drew the veil between the Father's countenance and the Saviour's soul, when horrible darkness covered the earth, and he cried, in the bitterness of his broken heart, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God's affection to his holiness seemed, in this instance, to surmount his affection to his Son. Rather should his well beloved Son expire on a disgraceful cross, than sin should be suffered to live, and his holiness be disparaged by the violations of his law. Thus was sin made the chief mark of his displeasure, while the poor sinner becomes the happy object of his pitiful regard. The odiousness of sin is exposed, while the compassion of his heart is dis-

played. His infinite abhorrence of sin, and his infinite love to the sinner, go hand in hand together. Thus "Mercy and Truth meet together"—Mercy to the misery of the sinner, Truth to the purity of the law. "Righteousness and peace embrace each other"—the Righteousness of God, and the Peace of the believers in Jesus; and thus "there is forgiveness with God, *that he may be feared.*" And this leads us to the last evidence we shall produce of the holiness of God.

6. The holiness of God appears in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and in all means appointed for that purpose.

God, who, from eternity, designed the everlasting happiness of his people, decreed that they should be holy; "he predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son." Rom. viii. 29. For this purpose he gave his Son, and his Son gave himself, "that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." It was impossible that Jesus Christ, who is "the Holy One of Israel," should become "the minister of sin," or even permit the purchase of his blood to remain the slaves of corruption: he came "by water as well as by blood" (1 John vi. 6); and intended, by the power of his death and resurrection, to introduce us not only into a relative state of happiness by justification, but also into a real state of grace by sanctification. "For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. vi. 10.

For this purpose also the Holy Spirit is given to all believers, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." It is by the gospel of truth that men are begotten again, and made new creatures, for "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." James i. 18. The gospel of the

free grace of God, which some mistaken persons charge with an unholy tendency, is the very instrument of renewing them in holiness after the image of God. The Saviour promised that his disciples should know the truth, and that the truth should make them free; and again he prayed for his disciples, saying, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." John xvii. 17. The faith which they have in Christ, if true and genuine, has always this effect —"it purifies the heart," "it works by love," "it overcomes the world." If men, professing to receive the truth, and to believe in Christ, are not holy, we are bold to say that their knowledge is not true, their faith is not genuine. They deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them.

All the ordinances of God's appointment, and all the means of grace, private as well as public, are instruments in the hand of the Holy Spirit to promote the holiness of believers. They are properly called "means of grace," for in the diligent use of them, God is pleased to communicate those "supplies of his Spirit," by which we are gradually and progressively transformed into his image, "from glory to glory."

For the same blessed end, he who governs the world, and orders all its affairs according to his all-wise and all-holy plan, so directs and overrules the affairs of his people, that "all things work together for their good." They certainly do so, when they promote and increase their holiness. This is particularly affirmed of their afflictions; for though these are irksome, and what we would gladly avoid, yet, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Afflictions are, indeed, "not joyous, but grievous," nevertheless, "they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and thus he who inflicts them, makes us "partakers of his holiness." Heb. xii. 6, 10, 11.

Thus then it appears, from the Scripture, from the original state of man, from the law, from God's

anger against sin, from the death of Christ, and from the work of the Spirit—that our God is a most holy God.

We conclude with some practical inferences from what has been advanced; and,

1. *Is God so holy? then how base and sinful is the hatred of holiness!* So awfully is man fallen, that he is not only by nature destitute of holiness, but he hates it in others. He forms a false notion of God, as if he were not holy. It is charged upon the sinner (Ps. l. 21) "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself,"—an unholy being, that could dispense with sin; as the heathens worshipped fancied gods, who were wicked like themselves. No wonder then, that those who love sin, hate holiness in others. Hence, all endeavours to be holy, are despised, by many persons, as mere hypocrisy; and the very name—*a saint*, is a term of the utmost contempt. A surer sign of being, at present a child of the devil, there cannot be, than to hate and despise holiness; for this is to hate and despise God himself, for he is holy, and holiness is his image. But let it be remembered, that "without holiness, no man can see the Lord;" and, most assuredly, they are "without holiness" themselves, who despise it in others. Let such persons tremble, and repent.

2. *Is God so holy? then what cause is there for humiliation!* Let all men, let even the best of men, prostrate themselves in deep humiliation, before this Holy Lord God. So did the holy prophet Isaiah, when he saw the vision in the text, and heard the words of it pronounced. "Woe is me!" said he, "for I am a man of unclean lips!" So, when holy Job had a special manifestation of the power and holiness of God, he cried, "Behold, I am vile! I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." A right view of the holiness of God will effectually repress the pride of our minds, and keep us from boasting

of good hearts and good works, and from "going about to establish our own righteousness." "Shall mortal man pretend to be just with God?" Shall he pretend to be pure in his sight? Far be it. Deep repentance and self-abhorrence better become him.

3. *We may learn from hence the need of a Mediator and Redeemer.* If we are duly impressed with the truth now declared, we shall cry, with the Bethshemites of old, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?" Who indeed? In themselves, none can stand. The best man must say with David, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." There can be no safe approach to this holy God, but by Jesus Christ the Mediator. "No man," said he, "cometh to the Father, but by me." But, blessed be God, we may come, we are invited thus to come. God has declared himself to be reconciled through the death of his Son; and now, by his servants, condescends to intreat us to be reconciled to him. Yes? we may now come; come even with freedom and boldness to the throne of his grace, and there obtain mercy to pardon all our sins, and grace to help us in every time of need.

4. Finally *Is God holy? then let us also be holy.* Such is the high command of God himself—"Be ye holy, for I am holy." This should be our grand object. Here is the bright, the only perfect example, for our imitation. For this purpose, being born in sin, we must needs "be born again"—born of the Holy Spirit, whose gracious influence on the heart, through faith in the gospel, makes us a kind of "new creatures"—brings us, as it were into a new world; for such it is to every one who, contrary to the example of the world, sincerely hates sin and loves holiness.

This will render our worship truly holy. "Holiness becometh the house of God for ever." Let us then "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;" let us "praise his great and terible name, for he is

holy ;" let us " sing his praises with understanding." Let us also aim at still higher degrees of purification,—still beholding in the gospel, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. May we be " changed into the same image, from glory to glory,"—" perfecting holiness in the fear of God !"

" Now, the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever." Amen.

SERMON LXX.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

Deuteronomy xxxii: 4. Just and right is he.

JUSTICE, among men, is giving to every one his due; and the importance of doing so, is acknowledged by every honest man. It is easy to see that there could be no safety nor happiness in society, if justice were not regarded. If there are any persons who do not approve of the administration of justice, it is probable that they themselves are unjust. The character of a judge may not be very amiable in the eyes of a criminal prisoner, and he may not look forward to the approaching assizes with any degree of pleasure; he would perhaps be willing to dispense with the whole system of justice in our laws, because he is exposed to the punishment which those laws require; but honest and virtuous men highly approve of the execution of justice. They regulate all their affairs, in their dealings with men, by a regard to justice; and they wish to be treated in the same manner by their neighbours. This general regard to justice, this tribute of mankind to its excellence, leads us naturally to conclude that it must have the sanction of divine authority, and that it must be a perfection of the divine nature; and we could as easily conceive of a God without power, or a God without goodness, as of a God without justice. We are not left, however, to the mere conjectures or

conclusions of reason; we have the fullest authority from God's own word, to assure us that he is perfectly just. The assertion is made in the text, which is taken from the song of Moses; not that which was sung immediately after the passage of Israel through the Red Sea, but that which he uttered just before his death, and solemnly delivered to the people. He begins the sacred ode by ascribing glory to God; first, the glory of his greatness; and here, the glory of his justice and righteousness.

By the justice of God, we understand that universal rectitude of his nature, whereby, in his government of the world, he does all things with perfect righteousness, giving to every one his due.

1. We are to consider God, not only as the Maker and Preserver of men, but as their *Governor* also. He who made man, and furnished him with all his wonderful powers, has an undoubted right to prescribe laws for his conduct, and to enforce the laws which he prescribes by sufficient sanctions, by rewards and punishments, as in his infinite wisdom he sees fit; and in so doing, he consults the good of his creatures, as well as his own glory; for as the peace and order of society cannot be maintained without human laws properly enforced, so we cannot conceive of the preservation of the divine government, without laws worthy of a wise, holy, and just God.

This right seems to have been exercised towards Adam at his creation. Besides the moral law, the substance of which is love to God and man, and which was written on his heart, a *positive* law was given to him, as the test of his obedience. One particular tree, though as pleasant to the eyes and as good for food as others, was forbidden, and that on pain of death; for this positive law was armed with a dreadful sanction—"in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

In like manner, God has given laws to all mankind. For many ages they were handed down from father to son, and afterwards renewed to the Jews

(and through them to a great part of the world) in an awful manner, at Sinai ; and where men have not this written law, they have, as St. Paul assures us, "a law in themselves, the work of the law written on their hearts ; and their consciences (more or less informed) accusing or excusing them," according as they observe it or break it. Rom. ii.

Now the law which God has given to man, is worthy of himself. It is said, in Rom. vii. 12, to be "Holy and Just, and Good :" it requires nothing but what God may justly demand of man ; nothing but what man ought to pay : for, can any thing be more reasonable, than that we should love the supreme good in a supreme manner ; and, loving him, should abstain from what he forbids, and perform what he requires ; especially when both would be for our advantage, our safety, and our happiness ; and when disobedience would terminate only in our everlasting destruction ? Thus, as the apostle saith, "the commandment was ordained unto life ;"— "but," he adds, in words that well demand our serious regard—"I found it to be unto *death*." Rom. vii. For now, alas ! man is a fallen creature : fallen in Adam, the first sinner ; and is no longer able to render the full obedience required by the law. God, however, has not lost his right to command. His law, like himself, is unchangeable ; and if not obeyed, renders the sinner liable to his just and awful displeasure.

2. We observe then, in the next place, that God is just in punishing disobedience to his holy law. As he sanctioned the law of Paradise, with that dreadful threatening, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die ;" so he sanctions the moral law with a terrible curse, as it is written (Gal. iii. 10) "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to *do* them." Observe, he who performs not *all things*, he who *continues* not to perform them all, without omitting one, without a single failure in thought,

word, or deed ; and, that this is the meaning of the passage, appears from another text in St. James (ch. ii. 10), " For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." The law has not relaxed in its demands, in consequence of the fall and frailty of man. Some have pretended that now *sincere obedience* only is required instead of perfect obedience ; but this notion has no foundation in Scripture, and tends strongly to encourage sin ; for most men, however sinful, flatter themselves that they are sincere, though imperfect. It is not by reducing the demands of the law, that a sinner is entitled to entertain hope of salvation ; but by looking to him whom the gospel sets before us as " the end of the law for righteousness," who has " redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal. iii. 13. But the law itself affords no relief: it may convince ; it must condemn ; and it leaves every one, who seeks salvation by obedience to it, under its fearful curse. St. Paul therefore justly concludes (ver. 10), that " as many as are under the law, are under the curse ;" and, " that every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God ; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." It is by the *gospel*, and not by the law, that we obtain the knowledge of Christ, " whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for sins ; that he might be *just*, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. iv. 19, 20—25.

3. If we consult the Scriptures, we shall find that God has displayed his justice, in many awful instances, by the punishment of sinners*.

The rebel angels were expelled from Heaven ; they are awful monuments of his justice already ; and will be rendered visibly such in the judgment of the great day. What a dreadful revolution did sin oc-

* The following instances are more briefly expressed, on account of their having been introduced in the sermon on God's Holiness ; but it was not proper wholly to pass over them in a discourse on Divine Justice.

casion in *our* world! see Adam cast out from Paradise; the earth cursed for his sake; the man doomed to severe labour; the woman to multiplied sorrows; the creature "made subject to vanity;" and trouble, sickness, and death, like a mighty flood, overwhelming all mankind.

When men had multiplied on the earth, sin seems to have preserved a sad proportion to their numbers; and wickedness rose to such a daring height, that Justice could no longer forbear, but opened the windows of Heaven, and unbarred the gates of the great abyss, and poured universal destruction on a guilty world.

At another time, fire from Heaven consumed the base inhabitants of Sodom; and the sword of Israel was the instrument of divine justice in the extirpation of the wicked Canaanites. Israel herself, highly favoured as she was of God, could not escape his chastising hand, but always suffered when she sinned. It was divine justice that armed the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans, and made them the severe scourges of an ungrateful and backsliding nation. In like manner, nation after nation, in their turn, having filled up the several measures of their iniquities, have declined and perished. Men ascribed their fall to the ambition of a neighbouring conqueror; but the real cause was predominant sin, punished by the sword of divine justice.

It is true, that God does not always execute immediate justice on every transgressor; but this is no impeachment of that perfection, although it be abused by some: "because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, the hearts of men are fully set in them to do evil." It is possible that the impunity with which some atrocious rebels seem to sin, may stumble even believers themselves, who cry, in the perplexity of their spirit, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" "How long, O Lord, shall the wicked triumph?" But they should

remember that the judge of all the earth will certainly do right. Sometimes the wicked may be spared as instruments of public good. Contrary to their intentions, they may eventually effect the purposes of Heaven. Besides, the present is a state of probation. God is giving them "time and space for repentance," and, if they repent not, his arm that delays to strike, will fall with a heavier blow hereafter; and patience abused, will aggravate their future punishment.

Often, however, the great God convinces the world that he has not relinquished the government of it. His vengeance falls heavily on some distinguished rebels. Bloody persecutors have sometimes been signally cut off. Murderers have often been remarkably detected. Perjured wretches, and those who have called God to witness their falsehoods, have been suddenly destroyed; and Conscience, awakened and terrified, has frequently supplied the place of accusers, witnesses, judge, and executioner. Yes! and thus "God is known by the judgment that he executeth." Ps. ix. 16. Verily, there is a God that judgeth on the earth."

Indeed, the operation of conscience, in general, among all the children of men, affords a striking evidence of the Justice of God. Why else is it that every man feels pleasure when he has performed a good action, and pain when he has committed a bad one? Conscience, like the grand jury in our excellent constitution, finds the bill that is afterwards to be publicly tried, and frequently anticipates too the fatal results of the trial. And although there are instances in which good men are exercised with heavy afflictions, and others in which bad men enjoy abundant prosperity, yet it is certain that, that which is good tends to good, and that which is evil tends to evil. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness;" "godliness is great gain;" "length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour." A life of virtue and religion tends to health,

wealth, and long life; while, on the other hand, vice and ungodliness as powerfully tend to disease, poverty, infamy, and death; and this wise distribution of things is a standing evidence of the Justice of God.

4. But the most affecting display of divine Justice was made in the sufferings and death of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, this was the chief design of the death of Christ. When all men had "sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" when they had dishonoured his holy law by their disobedience,—in what way could the honour of God be restored? If justice alone take place, the sentence of death must be executed, and every transgressor receive the wages of his sin; but if mercy interpose, and spare the guilty, what becomes of the justice of God? Here divine wisdom steps in, and provides equally for the glory of justice and of mercy. "God so loved the world, that he gave"—"he spared not, his only-begotten Son;" "he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; our sins were made to meet upon him; and the Lord laid upon him the iniquities of us all." And why was this done? St. Paul says, it was "to declare the righteousness or justice of God;" and thus to convince all the world that "he is just, while the justifier of him that believeth." Thus a just and holy God "condemned sin in the flesh" (of his own Son) "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in (or *for*) us."—See *Isa.* liii. 5; *Rom.* iii. 25; and viii. 3. On this ground, God will appear to be *just*, as well as merciful, in pardoning and justifying the believer in Jesus. On this ground it is said, concerning the penitent and believing sinner, "Save him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom." Job xxxiii. Grace is thus exalted to the hightest degree, but not to the disparagement of justice; both are exalted together; as saith the apostle (Rom. iii. 24), "Being justified freely by his grace, through

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." If pardon for the chief of sinners could not be obtained, how would it appear that God is infinitely merciful? but if pardon were bestowed without any satisfaction for sin, how would it appear that God is infinitely just? But when God is pleased to punish sin in the person of his dear Son, and in consequence of the honour done to his law thereby, he is pleased to pardon and save the guilty; abundant provision appears to be made for the glory both of justice and mercy; and thus, "Grace reigns," but it "reigns *through righteousness*,"—through the justice of God in punishing sin, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the illustrious sufferer. Rom. v. 21.

On this foundation, the vilest sinners, the greatest offenders, being penitent, may hope for mercy; for "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins;" not for the merit of repentance, as some falsely conclude, but because "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," as St. John saith (1 John i. 7, 9) and as he affirms immediately after, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." He further informs us on what grounds this powerful Advocate pleads for our pardon; this immediately follows: "He is the propitiation for our sins," ver. 2. He does not, therefore, sue for mere mercy: he pleads the price paid, the ransom laid down, the death endured; and the covenant, the promise, and the oath of the Father, made with and to him, in behalf of all who were given to him, redeemed by him, and who apply to him for salvation. "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." John vi. 37, and John xvii. 24.

Thus we have seen that God is infinitely just. Let us then "ascribe righteousness to our Maker." His ways may sometimes appear to be mysterious, but never let his justice be suspected. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Unquestionably. When he corrects his children, when he punishes his enemies, we ought to say, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints."

If God be just, we may certainly conclude that there will be a day of judgment. If God be just, "it shall be well with the righteous; it shall be ill with the wicked." If God be just, then "what a man sows, he shall certainly reap," and every man shall receive according to his works. If so, there must be a day of judgment—the day of "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." At present, wicked men may escape punishment, for this is the day of God's patience, and our trial. But such are the irregularities of the present state of things, that there must needs be a day of settling, a day of retribution. Let not then the daring offender flatter himself with impunity. If the young man "rejoice in his youth, and he walk in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes," let him know this—that "for all these things God will bring him into judgment." O! stand in awe, and sin not, for God will bring every work and thought into judgment, whether it be good or bad. If sinners would escape the punishment of their sin, let them believe the gospel, and take refuge in Christ. There is no safe approach to this just and Holy God, without a Mediator; but through him, who has glorified divine justice by his obedience to death, the greatest sinners may be accepted.

If God be glorious in his justice, it will be our honour to imitate him. "If we know that he is righteous, we know that every one that doeth righteous-

ness is born of him." If Justice require us to give every one his due, let us study to be just both towards God and man. Let us "give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." He who gives us all our powers, requires that we should give him our hearts. Yes; constrained by the mercies of God, let us present unto him our whole selves, body and soul, time, talents, and influence, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

Let us also be just to men. The great, the golden, the divine rule of conduct is, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same unto them." "Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." God abhors dishonesty, deceit, and oppression; "false weights and measures are an abomination to the Lord;" but "to do justice and judgment is more acceptable to him than sacrifice." God rejected the fasts of the Jews, as solemn mockeries, because they did not "loose the bands of wickedness, and undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free." Nor would he accept of their offerings, "till judgment ran down like water, and righteousness as a mighty stream." In vain do tradesmen and workmen, masters and servants, profess a regard to the gospel, unless they adorn the holy doctrine by a holy life; an eminent branch of which is, to act uprightly and conscientiously. Let no man then "go beyond and defraud his brother, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such."

Finally, let us *rely* on the justice of God. The justice of God is engaged on the behalf of believers, as well as his mercy. By the righteousness of Christ, justice is fully satisfied, and has no demands to make on the believer; but the Christian may humbly plead the justice of God in his favour. He is just, when he justifies the believer; and if we confess our sins,

"he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He is pleased to bind himself by his own free promises, and will assuredly be just in fulfilling them. Hence, it is written, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, and labour of love." He will do right. Much evil and injustice there now is, and always has been in the world. But every wrong, private, domestic, or public, will be called over in the great day. Then none will be thought too mean to engage his regard, none too great to escape his justice. Let this render the oppressed patient under their wrongs: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "He will execute righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." He will make "inquisition for blood."

Let the justice of God reconcile his people to all their afflictions. The King of Heaven can do no wrong; "the just Lord will do no iniquity." Are we punished or chastised? Let us say with holy Daniel, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee; but unto us confusion of face: the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth; for we obeyed not his voice." Dan. ix. 8, 14. He is "justified when he speaketh; he is clear when he judgeth."

From the justice of God, let his people expect a full accomplishment of all the gracious promises on which he has caused them to hope. "Verily there is a reward for the righteous;"—a reward of grace, not of debt. None shall be losers by him. If they "suffer for righteousness' sake; if men revile them, and persecute them, and say all manner of evil against them, falsely, for his sake, blessed are they; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." If they pray in secret, if they fast in private, if they give but a cup of cold water to a disciple of Christ, they shall in nowise lose their reward. Take courage, then, ye

humble followers of Christ; be patient until the coming of our Lord; be not weary of well doing; fight the good fight; persevere in your course; keep the faith; for henceforth there is laid up for you a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto you at that day;" and then shall an assembled world be constrained to say, "He is the rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity—*Just and right is he.*"

SERMON LXXI.

THE OMNIPRESENCE* OF GOD.

Psalm cxxxix. 7. Whither shall I flee from thy presence?

WHEN the great and glorious God is the subject of our meditation, a holy awe should possess our minds, like that which Moses felt when he approached the burning bush, which displayed a visible token of the divine presence: he was then commanded to take off his shoes as a mark of reverence, for the presence of God made the place itself holy. So when Abraham conversed with Jehovah in prayer, being deeply sensible of his own unworthiness, he cried out, "Behold! I who am dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak to the Most High God!" Such thoughts as these should fill our hearts, when we attempt to display, with our feeble and polluted powers, the infinite perfections of the great Supreme.

That awful, sublime, and most useful truth, which now calls for our serious attention, is this,

THE GREAT GOD IS EVERYWHERE PRESENT.

This doctrine seems necessarily to result from our belief of a divine Being—at least of such a Being

* As these Sermons are intended chiefly for plain people, the author admits a hard word unwillingly; but when the divine Perfections are the subject, it is difficult to avoid them entirely. It may be sufficient to say, that *Omnipresence* is unbounded presence, or a presence everywhere. In like manner, *Omnipotent* signifies, Almighty—powerful without limit. *Omniscient* is infinitely wise, knowing every thing.

as deserves the title *Divine;* for to suppose him confined to certain bounds and limits, is, in fact, to make him no God at all. Although some of the heathens said great things of their deities, yet in general their notions of them were low and trifling. They imagined that different gods presided over different countries; and, on some occasions, chained down their idols lest they should forsake them. Elijah, the prophet of Jehovah, rallied the disappointed worshippers of Baal; for, when they had cried from morning till noon, "O Baal, hear us!" and there was no answer, Elijah mocked them, and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god" (so you profess to believe) but perhaps he is too busy to regard you—"he is talking, or pursuing, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awaked." 1 Kings xviii, 27. But the glorious God, whom we adore, cannot thus be mocked; he is present everywhere; and especially, "where two or three" are assembled for his worship. He is here.

That God is, and cannot but be, everywhere present, will evidently appear, if you consider,

1. *His Infinity;*
2. *His Universal Providence;* and,
3. *The Testimonies of Scripture.*

1. *God is infinite;* and therefore omnipresent. To be *infinite*, is to be *without bounds* or limits; consequently, there are no limits to his presence. An infinite being cannot be contained in a finite space. It is the property of all *creatures* to be confined within certain bounds; and therefore we call them *finite:* but it is the property of the Creator to be unlimited, confined by no bounds; and therefore he is termed *infinite.* He is so in all his perfections: his knowledge is infinite; his power is infinite; his holiness is infinite, and so is his presence. "Whither then shall I flee from thy presence?"

Let us illustrate this great truth from the psalm

before us ;—and especially from the verses which follow our text. " If I ascend up into *Heaven*, thou art there : if I make my bed in *Hell*, behold, thou art there : if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the *uttermost parts of the sea;* even there shalt thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the *darkness* shall cover me ; even the night shall be light about me !" In vain then shall we try to shun his presence. Search the universe ! explore all nature ; but you shall find no place without God !

Search *Heaven.* Heaven is his throne, the seat of his glory ; there he will certainly be found ; for it is the happiness of saints and angels that they " always behold his face." We know not the extent of the heavenly world ; innumerable are its blest inhabitants, but " all the pure in heart see God ;" nor can we suppose that any person who is so happy as to be admitted into that glorious state, can hide, or wish to hide, himself from his presence.

Or if ; by the *heavens*, we understand the visible, the material heavens, that vast space in which we behold the sun, the moon, and the stars of light ; extended as these are beyond the utmost powers of calculation or conception, there shall no spot, in all the vast domain be found, in which God is not. The sun is said to be ninety-four millions of miles distant from the earth ; and the fixed stars are thought to be many hundred thousand millions of miles distant. What immensity, what grandeur, what glory is here ! God is here.

" If I make my bed in *Hell*" (Hebrew, *Sheol.*) If by Hell we understand the place of torment, where impenitent sinners are confined in chains of darkness, there, indeed, in a most awful sense, is God present !—present in the dreadful power of his incensed justice, inflicting the deserved punishment of sin ; for amongst the myriads of those miserable creatures, there is not one who escapes his notice, or avoids his rod.

But the word *Hell* sometimes signifies the *invisible world*,—the state of souls departed, whether in happiness or in misery. Of this state, as to the manner of their existence, mortals yet in the body know very little; it is to us the invisible, the unknown state: but it is not so to God. Jesus Christ is said (Rev. i. 18) to have "the keys of Hell and Death"—that is, of the invisible world, and of death, by which the spirits of men are separated from the body, and enter into the invisible world; consequently this state, and all the souls which are in it, are perfectly known to him; it is therefore impossible to avoid his presence there.

And thus, if we refer to the most distant parts of the sea and land, though far removed from the known and inhabited parts of the globe, in deserts and forests yet untrod by the foot of man, even there, everywhere, would God be present; and to make the foolish attempt of hiding from him, would be as vain as the effort of the refractory prophet Jonah was, "who fled from the presence of the Lord," in the land of Israel! but God followed him to the ocean, and by a dreadful storm, convinced him of his error, and taught him obedience.

This glorious perfection of God is intimately connected with another, equally essential to his being, that is, his *Omniscience*, or *Universal Knowledge*. God's knowing all things, implies his being everywhere present. The imperfection of man is very obvious; his knowledge, like his presence, is confined to very narrow limits. His relations, his friends, it may be, are in a foreign country, and he is anxious to know their condition; but he must wait weeks and months before he can obtain it. His dearest friends are at a few miles distance; they sicken and die, and he knows it not. Distance deprives him of the knowledge of the event. He is confined to one place. But God beholds, at one glance, all the children of men in every place; all their actions, all their words, all their thoughts. Yea, saith He, "every beast of

the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine." Yea, further still: "he telleth the stars, he calleth them all by their names." "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." "There is not a word on our tongues, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether!" "No thought can be withholden from him." "He seeth wickedness." "He seeth in secret." "Hell and destruction are before the Lord;—how much more then the hearts of the children of men!" Surely, then, God is everywhere present. This will further appear, if we refer to,

2. *His Universal Providence.*

We have already noticed his universal observation of men, their thoughts, their words, and their actions: but he is not a mere *spectator* of what passes in the world. Of that world he is the constant Supporter and Governor. He "upholds all things by the word of his power; "by him all things *consist*," that is, they *stand together*, in the same harmonious order in which he first placed them. Nothing in the universe lives or moves, independent of him. The sun, the moon, the planets maintain their station, or move in their orbits, by his influence. The seasons revolve, summer and winter, spring-time and harvest, succeed each other at their appointed periods. The earth produces food for man; yea, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, look to him for sustenance, and he giveth them their food in due season. The very sparrows are not beneath his notice, and the hairs of our head are all numbered.

He controls the affairs of empires and nations; the "hearts of kings are in his hand, and he is Governor among the nations." He overrules even the policy, the pride, the ambition, and the avarice of wicked men, for the purposes of his own glory, and

makes them the unwilling instruments of promoting the very objects which they wished to destroy.

But this *special providence* of God is exercised in behalf of his church: hence it is that God has committed the management of the whole world to Christ, the Mediator. "Angels, principalities, and powers, are all subject to him;" and he employs them for the benefit of his people. "All power," said he to his disciples, "in heaven and earth is mine; therefore go and preach the gospel to all nations;" and for your encouragement in that work, whatever difficulties you may encounter, whatever opposition you may meet with, remember this, "I am with you" (and will be with your successors in the Christian ministry) "always, even to the end of the world." It was the belief, and the sense, of the presence of Christ, that rendered the apostles and martyrs laborious and dauntless in their holy labours, and serene and joyful in prisons, and at the stake; it was this which made St. Paul rejoice that, when "all men forsook him," when he appeared before Nero, "the Lord stood with him and strengthened him:" and this presence of the Lord (miraculously visible) animated Stephen, the first confessor, when he said to the Sanhedrim, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

If further evidence be necessary to prove the universal presence of God, let us, in the last place, derive it from,

3. *The Testimonies of Scripture.*

Many of these have already been produced, in the two particulars already mentioned; a few more will strengthen the evidence.

It is expressly affirmed (Prov. xv. 3) that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;" and again, in 2 Chron. xvi. 9. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of

them whose heart is perfect toward him." It must needs be so, if you consider that the divine inspection reaches even to the hearts of men, so that the most secret springs and movements of our minds, though unknown to our fellow-mortals, are fully exposed to his observation. Thus, when aged David transferred the kingdom to Solomon his son, he exhorted him "to serve the Lord with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind," enforcing his exhortation with this solemn truth, "for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Happy would it have been for Solomon had he duly regarded this! Happy will it be for us if we habitually regard it!

When Jesus Christ dictated to St. John the seven epistles to the angels of the seven churches in Asia, he says to each of them, "I know thy works;" and he adds to one of them—"These things, saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire; all the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give to every one of you according to your works." Rev. ii. 23. The belief of this truth enabled Peter to appeal to his Master, when the question was thrice repeated, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter replied, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." In a word, "there is not any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Heb. iv. 13.

The presence of God is, in a most gracious manner, granted to his church. The name of the church, as predicted by the prophet, was to be "*Jehovah Shammah*"—The Lord is there." Of the temple at Jerusalem, the centre of the ancient church, God was pleased to say, "My heart and my eyes shall be there continually," denoting his most gracious presence, and parental affection; and we are sure that the church of Christ is not deserted by its glorious King. "Wherever two or three are gathered together

in my name," said the Saviour, "there am I in the midst of them." Matt. xviii. 20. None but an Omnipresent, and consequently a divine Person, could say this; and what an encouragement does this afford to public worship and social prayer! Jesus, the Son of God, is always present to assist, accept, and bless his pious friends!

But I imagine that I need not multiply Scripture testimonies to that point. The truth is sufficiently established. O that it were more generally regarded! Few deny the omnipresence of God; but alas! many forget it. It stand in need therefore, not so much of proof, as of practical

IMPROVEMENT.

From hence we may learn how much there is of *Practical Atheism* in all wilful sin.

Surely Adam forgot himself, when he sought to be hidden "from the presence of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden." Ah! how could he suppose that the thickest trees of Eden could conceal him from the sight of his Omniscient Maker? So soon did sin introduce guilt, and fear, and *folly!* And yet his posterity approve and imitate his conduct. They think, or seem to think, that they may sin without his observation. "The wicked hath said in his heart (if not with his tongue) God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it:" but the Psalmist reproves the atheistical notion, and immediately adds, "Thou *hast* seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand." Psalm x. 11. Why then do the workers of iniquity evade the light of day, court the shadows of night, shun the notice of fellow-mortals, and retire to secret places? The reason is, "they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." "These are the people," said Job in old time, "who rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof." On the

contrary, "the eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face." In like manner the housebreaker is described, "In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the day-time; they know not the light; for the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if any one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death." Job xxiv. 13, &c. Now, what practical Atheism is all this! What! do these *night-sinners* believe there is a God? *What* a God! A God, like a man, who is deceived by darkness? But such a God would be no God at all. Let these mistaken and presumptuous sinners know, that "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Job xxxiv. 22. Let them observe what is said in this Psalm (ver. 11th) "If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee! Wretched mortals, deceive yourselves no longer! Reflect a moment, and you will perceive your mistake. Why do you shun the eye of man? Are you afraid of him? And will you not be afraid of God? Will the presence of a child keep you from a wicked action? And will not the presence of God do it? Ah! sinner, even your "secret sins are placed in the light of his countenance;" and if not repented of, and pardoned, and forsaken, they will all be published before an assembled world at the day of judgment; for, "God will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or bad." He will then "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Then the book of God's remembrance, in which is recorded every sinful deed, shall be opened, and "the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the book, according to their works." Eccles. xii. 14; 1 Cor. iv. 5; Rev. xx. 12. Cheat then your own souls no longer with the

pretence of secrecy; and know that there is no house so privately situated, no time or place so unsuspected, no chamber so retired, no curtains so closely drawn as to hide the guilty deed from the all-seeing eyes of an ever-present God. You cannot deceive him, ah! why should you deceive yourself?

While this subject suggests matter of reproof, and even of terror, to guilty sinners, it may become a source of *consolation* to the sincere Christian. It affords comfort to him in his private retirements for devotion. He withdraws from the busy and the gay world, to converse with his Bible and his God in secret; and his Father, "who seeth in secret, shall reward him openly." So Jesus said to the devout Nathaniel, that "Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile—when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee:" he had retired probably to his garden, secluded from the eyes and ears of men, for the purpose of meditation and prayer; perhaps earnestly desiring to know whether Jesus were the true Messiah or not. There the eye of Christ beheld him; not the eye of his humanity, but of his divinity, from which the darkest shade affords no concealment. This discovery of Christ's knowledge fully convinced Nathaniel that Jesus was the Messiah. The omnipresent Saviour still observes the closet religion of his people, though carefully concealed from the eye of the world, and he will, in the great day, reward it openly.

In deep affliction, it is a comfort to know that the Lord is at hand—'a very present help in the time of trouble." "Lover and friend," it may be, "are far away:" relations and physicians may be at a distance; but God is not far from us; and the language of his promises is, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God, I will help thee." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flames

kindle upon thee." Animated by these most gracious declarations, the christian may boldly say, "God is my refuge and strength; therefore will I not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." These promises have been made good to believers, and they have found "joy and peace in believing." Christians, banished from their native country, have still enjoyed the presence of their God, which is confined to no particular spot. Shut up in loathsome dungeons, prisons have become palaces, for the King was there; and encircled with furious flames, the raging fire could not scorch them, for the Son of God was present with them in the furnace.

Finally, Let us all take care habitually to recollect the presence of God. This will prove the most powerful check to our remaining corruptions, the most effectual shield against Satanic temptations, and the sharpest spur to holy duties. Remember that God is present. This is a rule in religion, of the greatest practical importance. In vain was Moses solicited by the luxuries of Pharaoh's court; in vain assaulted by the terrors of Pharaoh's anger: "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." When Satan tempts us to sinful actions, let it be recollected that "God seeth us;" "he knoweth the way that we take;" and let his presence prevail over the presence of the tempter. Are we called to perform difficult and laborious services? Weak as we are in ourselves, we can "do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth us." Why should we faint or fear, when, by his Spirit, "he worketh in us, both to will and to do." And in the performance of every duty, let the presence of God keep us close to our business. Bad servants are called in scripture, "Eye-servants," because they will not work unless their masters' eyes are upon them. Then, even idle servants will be in-

dustrious. We work, my friends, under the eye of our divine and gracious master. He is present with us at all times. Let us therefore "be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for we assuredly know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord:" and when that work is finished, he will say to each of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Then shall we know, in a far higher and happier manner that we can now know, what the presence of the Lord means. Now "we see him through a glass darkly; then shall we see him face to face, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "Comfort one another, brethren, with these delightful words." The text will never more become a question, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?"—for "in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Amen.

SERMON LXXII.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

Romans ii. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

AMONG the various perfections of God, which render him infinitely worthy of our admiration and love, his *Patience* requires our peculiar regard, for there is not a human being upon earth who is not interested in it. God himself accounts it his glory to exercise patience towards the children of men, for when his servant Moses desired to see his glory, God was pleased to make a solemn proclamation of his name, including this amiable perfection, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, *long-suffering*, and abundant in goodness and truth." His patience is his glory; it is "a diadem belonging to the imperial crown of Heaven." He glories in it as peculiar to himself. "I will not," saith he, "execute the fierceness of my anger, for I am God, and not man;" as if he had said, "Had I been man, the best and most patient man, I had destroyed them long ago; but as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways above the ways of man." And it is with a design to exalt the glory of this divine attribute, that St. Paul, in our text, speaks of "the *riches* of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," together with the genuine tendency of these, which is "to lead the sinner to repentance," he bears with thee, that thou mayest prevent the

dreadful blow, by humbling thyself before him, and forsaking thy sins. From these words we shall take occasion to shew, that

The great, holy, and just God, exercises most astonishing patience towards his sinful creatures.

Patience, forbearance, long-suffering, suppose the commission of offences. If God does not speedily punish the sins of men, it is not because he is not displeased with them. This indeed was the mistake of the Jews, to whom St. Paul speaks in our text. The goodness of God to them, made some of them think, that he would not punish the children of Abraham for their sins; but the apostle tells them, that they formed a wrong judgment of God, whose patience was not intended to lull them asleep in security, but to give them time, and space, and motive to repentance. If God does not at once execute his judgments on wicked transgressors, it is not because he does not notice them, and hate them, and determine to punish them. He who is infinitely holy, hates sin with a perfect abhorrence, of which he has given the world sufficient evidence in the numerous calamities which everywhere abound, in consequence of sin. The earth was cursed for man's sake; it produces thorns and thistles; cares, labours, and troubles; sickness, sorrow, and death, to remind the children of Adam that they have sinned, and that he is displeased.

The great God, seated on his eternal throne, beholds every individual of all the millions of mankind, and none of their actions can be concealed from his notice. He knows our "down-sitting and our uprising; he compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways:" and O, what a world of iniquity does he behold!—"the whole world," saith St. John, "lieth in wickedness"—"a rebel universe!—our species up in arms, not one exempt!" The Scripture testifies, that "all are un-

der sin; that there is none righteous, no, not one:" that so, "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Rom. iii. 10, &c. And, if every one be a sinner, if God beholds innumerable sins in every one of us, what must be the collected sum of a thousand millions of sinners who inhabit the earth?—and who can calculate the amount of sins repeated throughout the life of each transgressor, continued (in the case of many) for fifty years or more? God hears every oath that sinners utter: he hears thousands of these every moment. He observes all the lascivious glances of the eye, he follows the lewd and filthy sinner into the most secret chamber: he witnesses all the acts of fraud, and cruelty, and oppression, which are daily committed: and he beholds all these, not with indifference, but with infinite abhorrence, for "he is angry with the wicked every day." "I know," saith he, "your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins" (Amos v. 12); and, in another place (Ezek. xi. 5) he says, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." What provoking acts of iniquity does he behold in courts, in senates, in ships, in play-houses, in taverns, and in brothels; yea, in churches too, where too often, formality, wandering eyes and wandering hearts, hypocrisy, and unbelief, sins most hateful in his eyes, are to be found! All these things are noticed in order that they may be punished; they are recorded in his book of remembrance, and will be brought into judgment in the great day of accounts.

Let it not be supposed that God is not displeased, because he does not yet punish. Not only do the evils which abound in the world, manifest his anger against sin, but the testimonies of his word most fully and strongly declare it. Hear what he said to Israel in old time (Ps. lxxviii. 40) "How oft did they provoke me in the wilderness, and grieve me in the desert;"—"forty years long was I grieved with this generation;" and in another passage (Amos ii.

13) " Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves ;" and in another text, more strongly expressive of the divine hatred of sin than any other in the Bible (Genesis vi. 5, 6), " And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ; and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." These expressions, which are after the manner of men, must not be taken as if they implied any weakness or unhappiness in God ; but they certainly prove that he is greatly displeased with sin, and especially with atrocious sinners ; even as a parent, who is not only displeased at the disobedience and ingratitude of a son, but is also exceedingly grieved, grieved at his heart. Surely this should teach us to grieve for our own sins ! But if such be the just resentment which a holy God feels when sinners rebel, how wonderful is his patience in delaying the deserved punishment ! This is what we are called in our text to admire—" the riches of his gentleness, and forbearance, and long-suffering."

That we may more clearly discern, and be more deeply affected with the patience of God, let us review some of those instances which are recorded in the sacred Scriptures, or which are still manifested in the world, and in ourselves.

1. God was pleased to give a specimen of his patience in his conduct towards the first human sinners—our first parents.

The great Creator had been liberal to his creature, man. He was filled and surrounded with good ; there was nothing left him to wish for. He had all the liberty he could desire. There was no restraint laid upon him, save an easy abstinence from the forbidden tree ; to enforce which, his Maker had declared that disobedience should be punished by death. But, ah ! too soon did he yield to the force of temp-

tation; he saw, he took, he ate the fatal fruit. Soon did horror seize his soul, when his offended Maker approached, and approached, as he had reason to expect, to execute the dreadful threatening; for he had said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." But *did* he die? Did the thunderbolts of divine wrath strike him dead as he stood trembling in the thicket? No. Patience descends, for the first time, to this guilty world (which she has never since forsaken), and gives the condemned criminal a reprieve, a reprieve for 900 years. The sentence of death indeed was past, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;" but it was many centuries before it was executed; it was also accompanied with an intimation of redeeming mercy, by which, on believing, the worst part of the sentence should be remitted, for he was not to taste "the second death." What a living monument of patience did our venerable first father exhibit to all his numerous posterity, for almost a thousand years; every one of his pious decendants who beheld him would say, Behold the patience of God! The same patience was exercised towards the first born man, who, sad to think, proved a murderer, a murderer of his brother, a murderer of his pious brother; and who had no other provocation to the horrid deed than the piety of his brother and his own wickedness. And might it not have been expected, that in answer to the cry of Abel's blood, vengeance should have struck the bloody Cain to the earth, and to hell? But here again behold the patience of God; he received an awful sentence, and became a fugitive and a vagabond, but he was allowed a season for repentance, and his life was secured by a special provision. Gen. iv. 9—15.

2. Advancing in the history of the world, we find that in less than 1400 years, "the earth was corrupt before God; the earth was filled with violence; for all flesh had corrupted his way." The offended God determines to destroy the earth and its guilty inhabitants. "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of

waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under Heaven." But was this awful sentence immediately executed? No: "his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." Noah, who was himself to be preserved in the ark which he undertook to build, became a preacher of righteousness to his neighbours, that they also might repent, and escape the threatened punishment. On that disobedient race "the long-suffering of God once waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing." 1 Pet. iii. 20. Every stroke of the hammers, while that vessel was building, was a warning from God, and a fruit of his patience. How many, during that 120 years, repented and were pardoned, we are not informed—we hope there were many, but they died in peace before the flood came: of those who were living on earth at the time, none were preserved from the waters but Noah and his family. O how little was the patience of God improved by that generation!

3. Observe the patience of God towards the idolatrous nations of the heathen world. Most hateful to God is the sin of idolatry. It is defrauding him of his glory; it is serving the creature instead of the Creator; it is transferring the honour due to the most high God to dead men, to images of men, to birds, and brutes, and reptiles, yea, to devils; but idolatry was not their only crime; their morals were as depraved as their worship was false; the greater part of them were "filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; haters of God, disobedient to parents, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." This was their character. Yet, having sufficient light to know that these things were worthy of death, they persisted in the practice of them, and took pleasure in others who did them. Many, even of their lawgivers, priests, and philosophers, by their institutions, examples, and presence, encouraged the people in the

practice of these abominations, especially in celebrating the festivals of their gods. Most justly might the holy Governor of the world make a dreadful example of such egregious sinners, but he was patient and long-suffering; "the times of this ignorance God winked at." Acts xvii. 30. He so overlooked as not severely to punish. Great was his patience!

4. The history of the Jews affords most striking proofs of divine forbearance. No nation upon earth was ever so highly favoured. For no other people did God so miraculously interpose: no country was ever indulged with so full a revelation of his will, with such tokens of his presence; to them, therefore, he might justly say, "*You* only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish *you* for all your iniquities." Those iniquities were indeed numerous and aggravated; they are charged with being "stiff-necked and rebellious," and they frequently fell into idolatry; to which crimes they added the persecution and murder of the prophets; yet he endured, with much long-suffering, their ungrateful conduct. Forty years he endured their manners in the wilderness. It was long before he cast off the ten tribes of Israel; and before he sent Judah to Babylon. He restored them again to their own land, rebuilt their temple, and gave them another trial. They did not after this relapse into idolatry; but they lost the spirit of their religion, became formal, and hypocritical, and worldly, and substituted the traditions of men in the place of the word of God; still his patience was prolonged, and to them he made the first offer of the gospel; nor did he "destroy their place and nation" till they had rejected both his Son and the apostles, and then wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

5. The patience of God appears in his giving warning of approaching judgments. Thus, by Noah, he warned the old world; thus, by Jonah, he warned Nineveh; thus, by the prophets, was Israel warned, when captivity or war was at hand; and thus, our

Lord himself warned Jerusalem and the Jews of their impending fate. In this manner he commanded his people to act in the conquest of Canaan; they were to summon a city before they attacked it; and in this manner he proceeds towards all his rebellious creatures. This was a principal branch of the prophet's office in ancient days, as expressed in the book of Ezekiel (ch. iii. 17) "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." Awful admonition! but strong demonstration of the patience of God! In the same manner his long-suffering is still displayed. The faithful ministers of the New Testament, no less than those of the Old, are still his watchmen. Bear with them, ye who hate not your own souls; do not be angry with them, because they tell you the truth, nor reproach them as ministers of wrath, when they warn you to flee from the wrath to come. They are your best friends; they only act according to their commission, and they imitate the apostle of the Gentiles, whose joy it was that he could appeal to Heaven, that "he had not shunned to declare" to the Ephesians "the whole counsel of God," and that for three whole years he had "not ceased to warn every one of them, night and day, with tears." O consider these faithful warnings as tokens of the divine patience!

6. Once more, observe and admire the patience of God, in the reluctance with which he punishes men, and in the moderation with which punishments are inflicted. His judgments are long delayed, as long as possible. He strikes not till it be absolutely necessary. He convinces the world that "judgment is his strange work," and that he "doth not

afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Like a tender parent, necessity only urges him to chastise, and his language is, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Hos. iii. 8. And when he does punish, with what moderation is it done! "He stirs not up all his wrath." If he send into a country the famine, the plague, or the sword, all are not destroyed; some are spared, perhaps the greater part. At the worst of times it may be said, "He hath punished less than our iniquities have deserved," and "in the midst of judgment he remembers mercy."

We conclude with directing your attention to those practical lessons which the subject suggests.

1. *Let us take care that we do not abuse the patience of God.* This is a common and often a fatal fault. Because God is patient, sinners presume that he is unconcerned about their sins. Because he delays to punish, they conclude he never will. But this is to abuse his patience, and deny his veracity. Of this he complained in ancient times (Ps. l. 21.) "Because I kept silence, thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself;" but this vile abuse of his patience is so provoking to him, that he adds, "Consider this, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Wretched infatuation! Ungrateful treatment! Do ye thus requite the patience of God? Do ye thus despise—put a wrong construction on his long forbearance? If so, mark the consequence, as declared in the verse after our text, "Thou treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." For, observe, his patience will have an end. This perfection will not, like most others, be continued to eternity. It is adapted only to the

present time, and may end to-morrow, it may end to-night, yea, the next moment. Jesus Christ, foreseeing that the forbearance of God with Jerusalem was near a close, anticipates the dreadful day, and weeps when he cries, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." Sad it is to think, that the goodness which leads to repentance, should only serve to harden the heart, and embolden the sinner to persist in his sins. "Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccles. viii. 11. But, ah! what will be the consequence? The stroke long delayed will fall the heavier; the stream impeded in its course will increase its weight, and when once it breaks down the dam, will rush with such violence as to carry all before it: the debt that remains long unpaid, will be demanded with interest upon interest, and that terrific threatening will be fulfilled (Prov. i. 24, &c.) "Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind." To avoid this dreadful doom,

2. *Let us be concerned to improve his patience;* and our text directs us how to do it; "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance;"—it gives opportunity for it; and it has a tendency to produce it. God might have cut you down in the first of those sinful actions which perhaps you have repeated hundreds of times. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead in the act of lying, and so have many others been when uttering horrid imprecations. Zimri and Cosbi were slain when committing lewdness. Many have died in fits of drunkenness; and many persecutors have been snatched away before they could execute their wicked purposes, or soon after committing them. Why are we spared? Why more for-

bearance of us than others? It may be (O that it may!) that God designs to melt our stubborn hearts by his kindness. Delay then no longer. Lift up your heart with me and say, God be merciful to me a sinner! I yield, O Lord, at length. I admire thy long-suffering. I will tempt it no longer. O pardon my iniquity, for it is great. Wash me in the blood of the Lamb, and let thy good Spirit cleanse this foul heart, and make it new!

With what grateful admiration should believers reflect on the days that are past! The weeks, the months, the years when God "waited to be gracious." Long did he stand at the door and knock, before it was opened; and in the mean time, how many a neighbour, a friend, a companion perhaps of iniquity, was snatched away—they were taken, but you were left; left till you heard the voice of the Son of God, and lived. O 'tis a heart-melting consideration, that God should spare you, as a man spareth his son, till he brought you up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, set your feet upon a rock, and established your goings. O to grace what a debtor are you! Will you not henceforth sing his praise, admire his patience, and devote yourself to his service? How reasonable is it also that you should,

3. *Resemble the God of Patience.* We cannot have the same occasion for patience as he has, for we are not the rulers of the world; yet some occasion for it we shall certainly find. Some injuries from our fellow-creatures we must expect; some degree of opposition even for Christ's sake. But the patience of God must make us patient. Good men have sometimes failed here. Even Moses, meek as he was, was so offended by the stubborn Israelites, that he angrily called them Rebels. How unlike to God are those persons who are all in a flame at the slightest provocation, and meditate revenge under the pretence of a regard to honour. Even Christians themselves, in their families and in

their churches, discover too little of this amiable and God-like grace: but true Christian love "suffereth long and is kind; beareth all things, and is not easily provoked." O let the patience of God engage you to possess your souls in patience! Remember the instructive parable, in which our Lord reproves the cruel creditor, whose immense debt of ten thousand talents had been freely forgiven, but who went out and seized by the throat his fellow-servant, who owed him only a hundred pence. How ungrateful, how inconsistent, how provoking was his conduct! Let us, however, "forbear one another in love, and forgive one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."

SERMON LXXIII.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

Psalm cxv. 3. But our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

THE sovereignty of God is a sublime and difficult subject, yet very important and useful. Some of the divine perfections may, perhaps, appear to our selfish minds more amiable and attractive; but there is none in which our obedience and submission to him are more deeply concerned. Some of his attributes may seem more clearly to invite our confidence, and engage our affection; but as creatures in a state of subjection and trial, we are peculiarly interested in the divine sovereignty. It is necessary that we should be well established in this doctrine, that we may with sincerity pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven;" and that in the hour of adversity we may be able to say—"It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth him good."

Sovereignty signifies in general, Supremacy—the possession of supreme power—a right to govern without the control of another; or, as in our text, a power to act as one pleases. This right is here ascribed to God, and can belong to no other in the same sense or degree. Puny mortals, conquerors, and tyrants, have frequently assumed this right, and have exercised it over a small portion of this little globe, and over a few millions of their fellow-mortals; and history has awfully shewn how unfit man is to be

entrusted with sovereignty unrestrained; for great men are too often the subjects of an infernal sovereign, and slaves of their own bad passions; they are proud, ambitious, cruel, selfish, and misinformed: therefore, the common sense and common interest of mankind have led them to prefer limited monarchies, and to restrain human sovereignty within reasonable bounds; but the great, holy, and blessed God is incapable of any of these evils, and is perfectly qualified to exercise unlimited sovereignty over the whole universe, whatever worlds and beings it may contain, known or unknown to us.

Our present business shall be to establish and improve this great scriptural doctrine, that *the glorious God has a right to exercise dominion over all his creatures, and to do, in all respects, as he pleases.*

This right naturally results from his being the *Former* and the *Possessor* of heaven and earth. Who can dispute his right? He made all things; he supports all things; and is it not fit that he should govern all things? "For his pleasure they are, and were created;"—may he then not do with them as he pleases? especially when we consider that

He is infinitely wise. He perfectly knows all his creatures, all their actions, and all their tendencies. He is acquainted with the great plan which his own infinite mind projected before the beginning of time, and of which the wisest men know nothing, but that "he hath made all things for himself, to shew forth his own glory." As little children, however acute, cannot comprehend the movements of a large machine, or the operations of a manufactory, or the affairs of government, so we short-sighted mortals, whatever be our attainments, are unqualified to judge of the management of the universe; but we know that he is wise, and should rejoice to think that "the Lord reigneth."

He is also *infinitely righteous.* His sovereign rule is not that of a haughty tyrant; but of a most righte-

ous and holy Governor. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Yes; he cannot do wrong. His ways may be, to our apprehension, mysterious: his paths may be "in the sea, and his footsteps in the mighty waters," so that we may not be able to trace him: "clouds and darkness may be round about him," so that we may not clearly discern him; but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." It is the pride of man that arraigns the divine procedure at the bar of his reason, and concludes that this is right, and that is wrong, according as it agrees or disagrees with human notions and practices. God's ways and thoughts may differ widely from ours, but they are all right. "Just and true are all thy ways, O King of Saints."

He is also infinitely good. We may not always be able to discern the goodness of God. In particular instances, his dealings with men may seem severe; but we are bound to believe, from the essential goodness of his nature, that none of his actions are inconsistent with it. In human affairs, the imprisonment or execution of a criminal, may appear to an ignorant spectator a cruel action; but the intelligent observer knows that the general good of society is promoted by the punishment of evil doers. A child can hardly be prevailed upon to swallow a nauseous medicine, however necessary; but an adult person receives it as a benefit, calculated to restore his health and preserve his life; he will even submit to the amputation of a limb for the same purpose. Probably, those things in the course of Providence which seem the most severe, are equally necessary; and the destruction of whole cities or nations may be so, for aught we can tell: at least we may, with great propriety, say of God—

> "Good when he gives, supremely good,
> Nor less when he denies;
> E'en crosses, from his sovereign hand,
> Are blessings in disguise."

That the blessed God is not only perfectly qualified to exercise a sovereign rule over the universe, but that he actually does exercise it, has always done so, and will do so to the end of time, is absolutely certain and undeniable, and is uniformly asserted in the Scriptures of truth. It is unnecessary to stop here, in order to produce formal proof; it will be sufficiently evident while we point out some of the distinct instances of his sovereignty :—In the creation of the world—in the fall of man—in the method appointed for his recovery—in the application of redemption to sinners—and in all the temporal concerns of men, prosperous or adverse.

1. Observe the sovereignty of God in the creation of the world.

Why was this world made at all? Why made just when it was? Why made *as* it was? Why not made many ages before? Why organized as it is? a sun in the centre?—several planets (how many?) revolving about it?—the earth in her present orbit?—the moon attending her?—why other planets nearer the sun,—others more remote? Why was this globe inhabited? and by such a creature as man, so like other beings in some respects, so unlike them in others? A thousand such questions might be asked, One answer suffices for them all—"For thy pleasure they are and were created." Other reasons we know not, nor is any other necessary.

2. The sovereignty of God may be noticed in the awful event of man's apostacy.

Before the fall, his Maker entered into a covenant with him, not for himself alone, but for all his posterity in and with him, as their head and representative. If he should fulfil the condition of that covenant, abstaining from the forbidden tree, as the pledge of his obedience, all his posterity would be confirmed in the same state of happiness, and in the divine favour: if he transgressed, all his posterity would be involved in the consequences of that trans-

gression, and become liable to the same condemnation and misery with himself. Could all the posterity of Adam have been consulted, it is probable that all would readily have consented to this arrangement; but whether they would have approved or not, or whether men now approve or disapprove of this constitution of things, is of no manner of consequence. So God determined; and doubtless he determined rightly. He gave Adam sufficient power to maintain his integrity; but he left him free to fall. So his sovereignty appointed. Left to himself, he who could have stood, did fall, and by that fall

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe!"

3. The sovereignty of God is displayed in the method he has been pleased to appoint for the recovery of fallen man.

There was rebellion in heaven, as well as on earth. Angels rebelled, and were expelled from Heaven—not *all* indeed; and why not all? The sovereign goodness of God preserved the "elect angels" (1 Tim. v. 21) from falling; the rest "are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day." But man, apostate man, became the object of divine compassion; and no sooner did he need a Saviour, than a Saviour was promised—a Saviour who should assume the nature that had sinned, and restore the offender and his (believing) posterity to a better paradise than Adam lost. But why not include angels? They were beings superior to man. Divine sovereignty passed them by; "for verily he (the Redeemer) took not upon him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham"—"he took flesh and blood, that he might die, and by dying, make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Heb. ii. 17, &c.

That this method of reconciliation should be fixed upon, we ascribe to the divine sovereignty. That he should save any of the fallen race—that his Son

should be the Saviour,—that in order to his being a Saviour, he should be incarnate—be born of a virgin—be born where and when he was—be a poor man, and a man of sorrows—should speak, and act as never man did, yet be treated as never man was; and that he who was to give life to the world, should himself die—die a violent death—die on the infamous cross, and that his so dying should be considered and accepted by a holy and just God as a sacrifice, satisfaction, and atonement for sin—that his blood should cleanse from all sin; and that, through faith in his blood, all sinners who believe should be freely, fully, and for ever justified, and entitled to everlasting life.—Such was the divine constitution; so God appointed in his sovereign pleasure; and therefore we conclude that this method of salvation is right and good, excellent and glorious, every way worthy of its divine Author, who will be eternally glorified by the whole intelligent universe for adopting it.

4. The sovereignty of God is no less displayed in the application, than in the provision of this great salvation.

The glorious gospel, which is "the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth," is sent to one place, and not to another. He has indeed authorized his disciples to proclaim his gospel "to every nation"—"to every creature;"—and no small share of blame, it may be feared, attaches to the church, and especially to the ministers of it, that greater efforts have not been made in obedience to that authority: yet we cannot deny the exercise of divine sovereignty, in the unequal distribution of gospel light. In the days of the apostles, Macedonia was preferred to Bithynia; and doubtless the providence of God directed the steps of the first Evangelists and of successive Missionaries. Some nations of the world are far more highly favoured than others. Many populous regions of Asia are destitute of a gleam of light, and others enjoy but

a very small portion of it. Almost the whole of Africa lies in midnight darkness; and the vast continent of America knew nothing of the gospel till within a few centuries. Of all countries, Great Britain has the greatest cause for joy and gratitude. Here, surely, the sovereign goodness of God will be gladly acknowledged—"He hath not dealt so with every land, praise ye the Lord."

And will not every individual, who has "tasted that the Lord is gracious," ascribe all the light, the faith, the love, the hope that he enjoys, to the sovereignty of God? That he was pleased to send his gospel to the place of your abode (while others are passed by); that he should so order the circumstances of time and place, that you should be brought to hear the joyful sound; and above all, that the eyes of your understanding should be enlightened, your heart softened and humbled, the Saviour revealed in you the hope of glory, and you enabled, perhaps, in the face of contempt and opposition, to own his cause and follow him fully; while probably those who heard the same sermons, and were placed in the same circumstances with you, remain in their natural state, and, like "Gallio, care for none of these things," but despise and hate them, and speak all manner of evil of them and of you.—Now, to what will you ascribe the difference? Who maketh thee to differ from another? Was it your own superior wisdom and goodness? No; you will certainly say, "By the grace of God I am what I am; that grace was freely bestowed, and might justly have been withheld. Not unto me, O Lord; not unto me, but to thy name be the praise and glory of the saving change. Such was the language of our adorable Lord when on earth, when the seventy disciples reported to him the success of their ministry. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even

so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Luke x. 21.

The sovereignty of God our Saviour is apparent in the constitution and ordinances of his church. He has appointed what officers should dispense his word, and superintend its concerns. He has appointed the first day of the week instead of the seventh, to be the Christian Sabbath, for he is "Lord of the Sabbath." He has ordained the preaching of his word, prayer, and praise, to be the stated branches of public worship. He has appointed Sacraments, or external representations of spiritual blessings, and he has confined these to two in number, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; the first of these to be the badge of discipleship, shewing, by the use of water, that his religion was intended for the purification of all his people; and by the bread and wine in the latter, that Christ crucified, whose death we therein remember and exhibit, is the food and support of every believer. That Christ thus appointed the ordinances of his worship in the church, is a high instance of his sovereignty, and every Christian is in duty and in love bound to submit to all his appointments.

5. The sovereignty of God is obvious in his disposal of the temporal affairs of men, whether as *individuals* or as *nations*.

As individuals.—Our parentage, the circumstances of our birth, the place, the time, all are arranged by the great Ruler. The powers we possess, of body and of mind; the degree of education we receive, and on which, frequently, so much, in after life, depends; the culture or the neglect of the mind; the connections which we form, apparently the result, not so much of choice, as of what we call Accident, are all under the direction of Heaven; and so are all our concerns, whether we enjoy uninterrupted health and good spirits, or whether we drag on heavily, with a sick body and a feeble mind; whether we forsake the land of the living at twenty

years of age, or are detained in it to seventy or eighty, depends on the divine pleasure, for Jesus hath "the keys of death and of the invisible world." In like manner, his sovereign pleasure allots the bounds of our habitations; the nature of our employment, in a superior or inferior station; and the degree of prosperity or failure, that shall crown our labours or disappoint our hopes. Every prudent and laborious tradesman is not always successful; "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." "Promotion," says the wisest of men, "cometh not from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South." Events, that contradict all probabilities, often take place, to shew man his dependence on a superior power; for sometimes, as we read in Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 8), "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

The sovereignty of God should particularly be owned by the afflicted and distressed, who form a large proportion of human beings, man being "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." It is of great importance to know and remember, what was wisely observed to patient Job, that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;" that is to say, afflictions are not the effect of chance, they are in the hand of God; and therefore it is added, as a piece of advice to Job,—"I would seek unto God, and unto God I would commit my cause."—I would submit to his rod, and seek relief from him. Even those events which seem to us *casual*, and, as to the agents concerned in them, undesigned, are under the direction of heaven; so it appears from Exodus xxi. 12, 13, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death: but if a man lie not in wait, but *God deliver him into his hand*, then I will appoint thee a place whi-

ther he shall flee," that is, to the city of Refuge. This proves that nothing comes *by chance*, but the most casual events are under the control of divine sovereignty.

To the wicked, afflictions are intimations of God's holy displeasure against their sins, and solemn warnings to fly from the wrath to come; but to the children of God they are parental chastisements, the effects of tender love, and wisely directed for their good. The sovereign hand of the Almighty should be owned in both.

That sovereign hand is, perhaps, more visible in the affairs of nations; they rise and fall, flourish and decay, and the connection between natural causes and effects may sometimes be plainly discerned; yet that the Ruler of the world directs and controls them is sufficiently evident, for in his hand are both the causes and the effects. This might be fully illustrated from the history of Israel, and other nations connected with them, from their first rise in the family of Abraham, to their dispersion: a great part of the Old Testament might be adduced for this purpose, but time forbids. God was pleased himself to illustrate this before the eyes of Jeremiah, by the emblem of a potter, who, with the utmost ease, formed a vessel of the yielding clay, and as easily broke it, and formed it again into another vessel, "as seemed good to the potter to make it." "Cannot I do with you, O house of Israel, said the Lord, as this potter"—destroy a nation, or erect an empire? Jer. 18. The craft, the envy, the revenge, the ambition of men are often the occasions of wars, and fightings, and revolutions; the agents may be wicked men, but frequently they are the mere instruments of a holy and just God, in punishing an individual or a nation, ripe for ruin. The agent may be wicked, but God is righteous. "With him," said the wise and pious Job, "with him is strength and wisdom: the deceiver and the deceived are his. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools.

He looseth the bands of kings, or girdeth their loins with a girdle. He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them," &c. Job. xii. 16, &c. In this manner God displays, in every age, his sovereign dominion over the nations,—his management of the children of men, crossing their purposes, overruling their counsels, overpowering their efforts, and overcoming their opposition; and proving, to their confusion, that "in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them." Exod. xviii. 11. And in nothing is this, his sovereign power, more conspicuous, than in producing great and good events from the evil actions of his creatures, as in the case of Joseph, whose glory in Egypt was the result of the envy and cruelty of his brethren, and of the lewdness and lies of Potiphar's wife. Their actions and intentions were bad, "but God meant them for good." The Sabeans and the Chaldeans pillaged Job, but the glory of God, as well as Job's greater prosperity, was ultimately promoted. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was a tyrannical oppressor of the children of Israel, who could proudly say, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" but to him God says, "In very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." Exod. ix. 16. In a word, the greatest and most glorious event that ever took place in our world, the atoning death of Immanuel, was effected by instruments the most base and vile. It was by the "wicked hands" of the Jews, that Jesus "was crucified and slain;" but we are assured by St. Peter that even this was according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." The holy God is not the author, or abettor of the sins of men; it is impossible that he can concur in the moral evil of any human action; but we see that, in the exercise of his sovereign rule, he not only permits wicked men to perform bad actions, but by his infinite wisdom and power brings good out of evil. The sinner is condemned, but God is righteous.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty shews us, that *ready obedience to all his precepts* is our reasonable service. Is God the rightful Governor of the world?—are we his natural subjects?—has he made known his holy will to us?—and shall we not cheerfully obey him? As our *Creator*, we ought to obey him;—as our *Preserver*, we ought to obey him; and especially as our *Redeemer*, we ought to obey him. "I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage," said Jehovah to Israel; and then he proceeds to lay down his law for their conduct—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me," &c. Exod. xx. 2, 3. In like manner he speaks to us in the gospel, not from Sinai, but from Sion, "Because I am the Lord, and your God, and Redeemer, therefore are ye bound to to keep all my commandments."

The great lesson enforced by this doctrine is, *Humble submission to all his righteous pleasure.* Is God the Sovereign of the world, infinitely wise, righteous, and good? Has he an undoubted right to do as he will with all his creatures? Then surely he has a right to do as he pleases with *me.* He is too wise to err; too good to be unkind. I welcome all his sovereign will, for all that will is love. He says to me, in this painful, or in that bereaving providence, "Be still, and know that I am God;" and my submissive temper shall yield obedience. I will adopt the praiseworthy language of the most patient of men, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He will permit his suffering child to plead, as his only-begotten Son once did in his agony, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" but I hope he will strengthen me to add, with profound submission, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Amen.

SERMON LXXIV.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Psalm xxxiii. 5. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

IN discoursing on the glorious perfections of God, his *goodness* must by no means be omitted; for though all his perfections are his glory, yet this is particularly so called; for when Moses, the man of God, earnestly desired to behold a grand display of the *glory of Jehovah*, the Lord said, in answer to his petition, "I will cause all my *goodness* to pass before thee;" thus intimating, that He himself accounted his goodness to be his glory (Exod. xxxiv. 6); and it includes that mercy, grace, long-suffering, and truth, which are afterwards mentioned. When it relieves the miserable, it is *mercy;* when it bestows favours on the worthless, it is *grace;* when it bears with provoking rebels, it is *long-suffering;* when it confers promised blessings, it is *truth;* when it supplies indigent beings, it is *bounty;* and this is the principal view we shall now take of it. The *goodness of God* is a very comprehensive term; it includes all the forms of his kindness shewn to men, whether considered as creatures, as sinners, or as believers: but I purpose to consider the goodness, mercy, and love of God distinctly. All might, indeed, be comprehended in one word; but as these attributes are so amiable and encouraging, and as our happiness is so much concerned in them,

it may be for our advantage to view each of them separately; and though there should be some degree of sameness, or repetition, in our so doing, I trust it will not be a vain or tiresome repetition. I shall therefore take a view of the *goodness* of God, as it respects creatures; the *mercy* of God, as it regards sinners; and the *love* of God, as it relates to believers. Now, by the goodness of God, we mean,

That disposition of the divine Being which always inclines him to render his creatures happy, as far as is consistent with his other perfections.

The goodness of God is generally distinguished into *Absolute* and *Relative*. By *absolute goodness* is meant that essential property of his nature which he had in himself from eternity, before any creatures were formed, and without regard to creatures. His *relative goodness* is that perfection exercised towards his creatures; it is his generous disposition to do them good, and make them happy. Both are included in that Scripture (Psalm cxix. 68), *Thou art good—and doest good.* God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably good in himself; so that it may be truly said, *There is none good but one, that is God* (Mark x. 18): none good in comparison of him; none good originally, absolutely, perfectly, immutably, like him. But it is his goodness as *imparted*, as communicating good to his various and innumerable creatures, which we are now to contemplate. For this purpose he made the world, and placed therein a variety of creatures, which might be capable of receiving his goodness in a variety of ways, according to the distinct capacities of their several natures; but especially man, a rational creature, capable of knowing his benefactor, and of glorifying him for his bounty. It is the goodness of God to *man*, chiefly, that we shall now consider.

1. Observe then, in the first place, the goodness

of God to man in the formation of his body, in the powers of his mind, and in that state of holiness and happiness wherein he was originally placed.

The human body is indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made;" it cannot be surveyed without astonishment; every limb, every sense, every faculty, bears the clearest marks of the beneficent hand which produced it! The outward form of man is evidently far superior to that of the brutes. The delicacy of his composition, his erect posture, his beautiful countenance, his capacities of action and of enjoyment, give him a vast pre-eminence above all other creatures on earth; and his supremacy over them, is admitted almost by them all—so that with little difficulty they are brought to spend their lives in his service.

But it is in the powers of his mind;—in his possession of a thinking, reasoning, immortal principle, that we perceive his chief superiority. The brutes have some advantages above us, in their speed and in the quickness of their senses; but "the inspiration of the Almighty has given us understanding, and taught us more than the beasts of the field." Every one who reflects on his own powers, his perception, his imagination, his judgment, his memory, must be sensible of their high value. These are sources of unspeakable enjoyment, usefulness, and happiness; affording a gratification, always at hand, and infinitely superior to the grosser pleasures of sense, which are often dearly purchased, which soon cloy, and, if irregularly indulged, are sure to destroy us. It is a wonderful privilege granted to man, that he is capable of knowing his God; and, while all other creatures are merely passive subjects of his goodness, man can reflect upon the bounty of his Maker—can "taste and see that he is good," and give to him the glory due to his name. God has also made us *immortal*. Other creatures have but scanty sources of pleasure; they enjoy them but for a short season; they die and perish: but man is

born to live for ever. He is to be the inhabitant of another world; his days are to run parallel with those of God himself; and, if saved by grace, his happiness will be inconceivably great, and never, never terminate.

Look back also, and reflect on the goodness of God to man in his original state. He made man "in his own likeness, in his own image," that is, in the image of his own wisdom, purity, and holiness, by which he was qualified to glorify his Maker on earth, and to enjoy superior bliss in his immediate presence in a future state. Surely, the goodness of God was wonderfully displayed in the formation of man! Indeed, the Creator himself, surveying all his wonderful and excellent works, and especially man, the master, and the master-piece of them all, pronounced the whole to be "good"—to be "very good!"

2. Consider also, the ample provision made for the comfort of man. The world was made *for* him. "The earth hath he given to the children of men." As man was made for the honour of God, so the world was made for the support and delight of man, in order to his due performance of his service to God. The sun and the moon were ordained to give him light; the grass is a beautiful carpet spread for his feet; the heavens are a splendid canopy stretched over his head; the trees afford him delicious food; the earth produces wholesome grain; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, furnish his table, in immense variety, with pleasant and nourishing food. His garments, whether for necessity or ornament, are borrowed from the innocent sheep, the silk-worm, and the cotton tree; the sturdy ox, and the generous horse, contribute their labour to lessen his toil, and enable him, with comparative ease, to cultivate the earth, and perform his journeys. The diversified beauties of nature,—the hills, the dales, the rocks, and rivers, and seas, delight his organs of vision; the songsters of the grove ravish his ears with their musical notes, and

the flowers of the garden regale his nostrils with their fragrant odours. "Lord! what is man, that thou art mindful of him!" "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

3. The goodness of God to man was discovered in placing him in so agreeable a state originally, and in giving him so holy and good a law. The commandment which he gave him, was not grievous. No more was required of him than what was written on his heart, and which he had full power to perform. Obedience was easy and pleasant to him; it was the condition on which his own happiness and that of all his posterity depended; and the threatening of death annexed, was a further instance of the goodness of God; because it was calculated to preserve him in his integrity, by the fear of ruin to himself and all his race.

4. The goodness of God is apparent in preserving the order of the universe, for the welfare of man. He who first made, still "upholds all things." The heavenly bodies perform, with the most astonishing punctuality, their appointed revolutions, any irregularity in which order, might be fatal to the earth and to man; and a regular succession of the seasons is secured by the promise and providence of God. Hence we have "summer and winter, seed-time and harvest." "He visiteth the earth, and watereth it; he prepares the corn when he hath so provided for it; he blesseth the springing of the earth; he crowneth the year with his goodness, and his paths drop fatness; the little hills rejoice on every side; the pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Even the inferior creatures are the objects of his care. "The young lions roar, and seek their meat from God." All animals "wait upon him, that he may give them their meat in due season; that which he giveth them they gather; he openeth

his hand, and they are filled with good." In a word, "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

5. To the same cause we must thankfully ascribe our defence against innumerable evils and dangers, seen and unseen. "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast!" Our greatest danger is from invisible enemies. What would evil spirits effect, were they permitted? Satan "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" we are therefore taught to pray, "deliver us from evil," or rather, "from the evil one." The malice of evil spirits is plain from the case of Job, whose character, property, family, health, and life, were assailed by him; and whose security, Satan himself, ascribes to the Almity in those remarkable words, "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about all that he hath?" The goodness of God is our shield and our defence.

Our security from wicked men is likewise from him. We too often see what wicked men would do, if they were permitted; but he sets bounds to their raging and cruel passions, as well as to the stormy billows of the ocean. "He stilleth the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the people." Without this restraint, how would murders, adulteries, robberies, perjuries, and oppressions, prevail in the world! Men would become, as the prophet speaks, "like the fishes of the sea," destroyers of each other,—"like the creeping things, which have no ruler over them." And this should make us thankful for the wholesome laws, and the just government, of the country in which we live. It is by the instrumentality of the magistrate, that the peace and order of society are preserved; without this there would be no safety to our persons or property,—the world would be like a howling wilderness, infested by lions, and tygers, and serpents: but the "shields of the earth belong to God"—they are the effects and instruments of his goodness, and let this be acknow-

ledged with gratitude by every man, "sitting under his vine and his fig-tree, without fear."

Let us in like manner, ascribe to his goodness, that social order and good behaviour, which generally prevail, in this and in other civilized countries, and which contribute so much to the comfort of life. There are some faint traces of the moral law, upon the hearts of men, in general; and we owe still more to the common influence of Christian truth, Christian worship, and Christian example, upon multitudes of persons who, it may be feared, are not real and serious Christians: But, considering man as a fallen creature, we ought to be thankful that the state of things is no worse than it is, and ascribe to his goodness whatever is moral, decent, peaceable, and commendable among men:—the kindness of parents, the dutifulness of children, the submission of servants, the fidelity of husbands and wives, the obedience of subjects, and the justice of magistrates, all are the effects of divine goodness.

Our daily exemption from surrounding evils is also the fruit of divine goodness. The "earth was cursed for man's sake;" and Sin opened the floodgates of Misery. That we are preserved, so generally as we are, and for many years together, from painful, loathsome, and dangerous diseases; from storms and tempests, lightning, earthquakes, and inundations, should be the theme of our daily praise. Nor should we lose sight of those seasonable alleviations, which are afforded to the afflicted. The arts of medicine and surgery, the provision of soothing and healing remedies, the hospitals, infirmaries, and dispensaries, which abound in our land: and (which are some of its most beautiful ornaments) the parish relief provided by our humane laws, so superior to the precarious charity of other countries; and the innumerable societies established among us, for the instruction of poor children, the visitation of the sick, the care of the insane, the blind, the deaf and dumb, and other benevolent purposes; all these ben-

efits, through whatever channel they flow, must be traced to their original source, and that source is the goodness of God.

6. To form a just estimate of the divine bounty, let it be remembered, that it is bestowed upon unworthy and sinful creatures. God, who is infinitely holy, and who hates sin with a perfect hatred, might justly withdraw from his rebellious creatures all the tokens of his favour. This is in fact, "the manner of men." Men are used to feed their prisoners with "the bread of affliction, and the water of affliction;" and, "if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away?"—but the great and blessed God treats his bitterest enemies with kindness; and the generous conduct which he recommends to us, is no other than that which is constantly observed by himself. —"If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head:" it is thus that he melts down his obdurate foes, and subdues them with the arms of love. Those, therefore, who have entertained a just view of themselves as guilty sinners, have expressed their admiration of the divine bounty in the strongest terms. Thus Jacob, when surveying the interpositions of Providence in his favour, exclaims, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies!" and David, reflecting on the beneficence of Heaven in raising him to a crown, cries, "Who am I, O Lord God, that thou shouldest bring me hitherto!"

Thus we have taken a slight view of the goodness of God to man, in his original formation;—in the powers of his body and mind; in the ample provision made for his support and comfort; in the preservation of the world; his deliverance from innumerable evils,—and his enjoyment of innumerable blessings. All these are great, unspeakably great; but there is yet another display of his goodness which exceeds any one of these; which exceeds them all put together; which exceeds all the powers

of language, all the stretch of conception—it is *the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ*—concerning this it is said—said by the lips of the Redeemer himself—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "There is more of his bounty," says an eminent writer, "expressed in that one sentence, than there is in the whole volume of the world. It is an incomprehensible word—*So:* a word that all the angels in Heaven cannnt analyze. Few comment upon, or understand the dimensions of this *so*. In creation, he formed an innocent creature of the dust of the ground; in redemption, he restores a rebellious creature by the blood of his Son. It is greater than the goodness manifested in creation, in regard of the difficulty of effecting it; in regard of its immense cost; in regard of man's desert of the contrary: it was greater goodness than was shewn to the angels who stood,—greater than was granted to the angels who fell." But as this must be the subject of a future discourse, we shall not now enlarge upon it. For the present, let us endeavour to make some practical use of the doctrine of divine goodness.

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1. *Let God be praised for his goodness.* This is the pepper-corn of acknowledgment, which he demands, and expects, of us; and how frequently does the writer of the 107th Psalm, in which the displays of divine bounty are enumerated, exclaim, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!" Alas! that ungrateful man should need to be repeatedly urged to this reasonable and pleasant duty!

Let us not be satisfied with a *general* view of the goodness of God. Let every one of us review the blessings of God to *him* in particular. "Bless the Lord, O *my* soul, and all that is within *me*, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O *my* soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all *thine* iniqui-

ties; who healeth all *thy* diseases; who redeemeth *thy* life from destruction, who crowneth *thee* with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Let each record his own history, and trace the streams of mercy in his infancy, childhood, and youth: in the tender cares of parents, now perhaps numbered with the dead; in the advantages of early education, and salutary restraint; in preservation from the disorders of infancy; in deliverance from some threatening danger. How many thousand times has thy table been spread with the good creatures of God! how many refreshing and comfortable meals hast thou enjoyed! how many thousand nights of safe and comfortable repose! how often has he restored thee from pain and sickness! what favourable turns took place in thy affairs! but time would fail to enumerate all his benefits, O forget not all his benefits!

2. *If such be the goodness of God, how base is the ingratitude of man!* so God himself complains. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." The goodness of God is awfully abused by sinners. The goodness of God should excite the love of our hearts, and secure the obedience of our lives; but how is it perverted by sin! how is it abused to the purposes of luxury, of lewdness, of intemperance, of sabbath-breaking! How do men, like Jeshurun of old, wax fat, and kick against God; and thus, the bounties of Providence are turned into weapons of rebellion against their Giver, and instruments of destruction to themselves. "Do ye thus requite the Lord?" Is it thus, that "thou despisest the riches of his goodness, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" But this cannot be done with impunity. God observes with a severe eye, and he will revenge with a heavy arm, the abuses of his kindness.

3. On the contrary, *Let the goodness of God attract our hearts*, and engage them to adore, love, obey, and trust in him. "How great is his goodness! how

great is his beauty! He is infinitely worthy to be supremely loved. Among men, the shadow of his goodness excites our esteem, and "for a good man, possibly some would even dare to die." But the supreme Good demands our supreme regard. Let his name be adored;—let his worship be our delight;—let his praise be our employ;—let his commandments be our rule;—let his goodness encourage us to pray;—let his goodness invite us to trust in him, for "the Lord is good, he is a strong-hold in the day of trouble." He who gave us Christ, will withhold no good thing from them that love him. "O taste and see that the Lord is good! blessed is the man that trusteth in him." "O praise the Lord, for he is good; sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant!"

4. *Let us imitate him.* Let us endeavour, in our humble measure, to resemble God in the goodness of his disposition, and to imitate him in acts of kindness to our fellow-men. Sufficient objects will ever surround us: "the poor ye have always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." "To do good, then, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." For this purpose divine Providence permits an inequality among men: some have too little; others have somewhat to spare; and it is a high privilege conferred upon any, that they are able and willing to help their neighbours. We ought to remember the saying of our Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" and it is God-like to imitate our Saviour, who "went about doing good." Nor let our favours be confined to the deserving. Our Lord's direction is this: "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Let us, therefore, as we have

opportunity, do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Finally. *Look forward to the heavenly world*, when the goodness of God will be fully displayed, and perfectly enjoyed. Here, we *taste* that the Lord is good; but it is only a taste,—the feast is reserved for the future and eternal state; and if the foretaste of his goodness on earth be so sweet, what will the complete fruition of it be? If, even now, the believer's peace be a "peace passing all understanding;" if the believer's joy be a "joy unspeakable and full of glory," what may be expected in that better world, where "God himself shall dwell with his people, and be their God?" When "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." Rejoice, then, in hope of this glory of God; for "in his presence there is fulness of joy,—at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore!"

SERMON LXXV.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

Psalm lxii: 13. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth Mercy.

IN our mediations on the divine perfections, we proposed to take a distinct view of the *goodness*, the *mercy*, and the *love* of God; for though they are sometimes taken for each other, and, in some measure, included in each other, yet a separate consideration of them may be useful; especially as God's goodness relates to his creatures in general, and as *creatures:* Mercy relates to those only of his creatures which are *sinful*, and therefore *miserable;* and his love signifies the delight and complacence of his heart, in the special objects of his choice. We have already spoken of the divine goodness; let his *mercy* be the subject of our present discourse; and may we entertain such a view of this pleasing perfection, that we may learn to "hope in his mercy," and to "glorify him for his mercy." That which we shall now endeavour to prove and illustrate is, that

Mercy to miserable sinners is a distinguishing attribute of the blessed God.

Mercy, among men, is a soft and tender affection, arising in the mind on the view of human misery, accompanied by a desire to afford relief; and though we ought not to ascribe to God any painful feelings,

any passion or agitation, grief or trouble, such as we feel, yet we may consider mercy in God as his disposition and readiness to relieve his miserable creatures. Our text asserts, that Mercy "*belongeth* to him," or is "*within him*;" that is, it belongs to his nature; it is inseparable from him; it belongs to him more than to any other being; so that nothing in his creatures deserves the name, compared with his mercy; for he is "the Father of mercies," and "he delighteth in mercy;" it is his glory,—for when Moses (as mentioned in a former discourse) desired to see his glory, he gratified him by proclaiming his names and titles, the first of which was "the Lord God, *merciful* and gracious—keeping *mercy* for thousands;" and this forms the chief ground of confidence and trust in him, as appears from this psalm. David had found, by experience, that confidence could not safely be reposed in man; but finding that God was possessed of almighty power, and also of infinite mercy, he declares his resolution to trust in him alone.

As mercy relates to *misery*, we must necessarily consider the mercy of God as extended to miserable man,—to man in his fallen, sinful, helpless state, as a sinner; for, as "the whole need not the physician, but they who are sick," so none will seek or prize the mercy of God, but those who, in truth, feel, and confess themselves to be "miserable sinners." The Scriptures uniformly represent man as a depraved creature, having lost that original rectitude in which he was created. He is now so depraved, so "very far gone from original righteousness, that he is of his own nature inclined to evil." He is also actually guilty: charged with innumerable offences against God's holy law, in thought, word, and deed; "for what the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." Rom. iii. In this state, man must needs be miserable; for he is exposed to the righteous anger of an offended

God; "the wages of sin is death;" and it is, indeed, "a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God." This is the real condition of every man, whether he be sensible of it or not. If he be not sensible of it, his case is so much the worse; his danger is increased by his ignorance of it, for of course he will not seek for mercy: if it be known, then will the mercy of God be the chief desire of his soul, and his sincere prayer will be, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

That "mercy belongeth unto God," is the only truth that can support and cheer the real penitent. This is the relief of which the prophet speaks (Ps. cxxx. 1—3), where the deep distress of some convinced sinners is thus described: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared: let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption."

It seems to be a principal design of the word of God, and especially of the gospel of Christ, to satisfy the penitent soul, that "mercy belongeth unto God." Without these gracious assurances, the self-condemned sinner would be ready to despair; for it is no uncommon thing for those who have just views of the holiness and justice of God, and of the extent and aggravations of their own sins, to fear that their iniquities are too great to be pardoned, and that there is no help for them in God. The tempter also, who "goeth about seeking whom he may devour," and who prevails upon many to neglect the mercy of God, as scarcely needing it, frequently suggests to those who have lately become religious, that there is no mercy for them. But the gospel provides a sufficient antidote against despair; assures us that God is "rich in mercy to all that call upon him;" that "if the wicked man forsake his

ways, he will have mercy upon him ; he will abundantly pardon."

The grandest, the most affecting, the most satisfactory evidence of the divine mercy, appears in the person, character, sufferings, and death of the Son of God ; for it might be said, How can God be *just*, if he be *merciful?* Is he not infinitely holy? Does he not hate sin most intensely? Has he not threatened to punish it with everlasting death? And is he not true to his threatenings? How then can the honour of his justice be maintained, if mercy be shewn to the guilty sinner? This objection is reasonable. This inquiry is important. And the question could never have been resolved, had not God himself given the answer. The gospel now informs us, that "Mercy and Truth meet together ; Righteousness and Peace embrace each other." "The mercy of God is now exercised without prejudice to his justice, because justice received full satisfaction in the death of Christ, the sinner's surety; so that there is justice in punishing the sin, and mercy in relieving the sinner. The sin is punished by justice, in the Surety, and pardoned by mercy, in the sinner : so that he is just without impairing the honour of his mercy, and merciful without invading the rights of his justice."

This shews with what propriety Jesus Christ bears the name of "MERCY ;" for when Zacharias praised God on the birth of John, the harbinger of Christ, he cries, "Blessed be God, for he hath visited and redeemed his people!—to perform the MERCY promised to our fathers." Luke i. 72. Christ was the mercy promised from the beginning ; the mercy of all mercies, the matchless, the invaluable, the unspeakable mercy—the greatest and the best that God himself could bestow on a fallen world, for he is the medium of all divine communications with man ; the great, the only channel, through which his mercy flows to the guilty children of Adam.

That we may the better conceive of the nature

and extent of the divine mercy, let us attend to some of its properties.

1. *It is free and sovereign.* Mercy, indeed, is essential to his nature, and inseparable from it; we cannot conceive of God but as being merciful; yet, the exercise of his mercy is free and sovereign; it is regulated by his will and wisdom; and bestowed in such a way as is consistent with his infinite justice and holiness, and a due regard to the authority of his law, and the honour of his government. Wherever it is bestowed, it is freely bestowed; none can say they deserve mercy. Some ignorantly talk of "making themselves worthy of the mercy of God, by their repentance and reformation;" but this is to turn mercy into debt, and to set up merit is to destroy mercy. It is plain that all sinners do not obtain mercy; many neglect it; many live and die wholly careless about it, their hearts being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; if any therefore obtain mercy, it is from God who gives the desire, inspires the prayer, and leads the soul gladly to receive it through the hands of the Mediator. God himself declares the sovereignty of his mercy, saying to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion: so then (St. Paul concludes) it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Rom. ix. 15, 16. Indeed, that apostle was himself a marvellous instance of the freedom and sovereignty of divine mercy, which he frankly owns; for "I," says he, "was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy." He calls himself "the Chief of Sinners," but he was one of those "vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory," in which God was pleased "to make known the riches of his glory," that is, of his mercy: and this leads us to observe,

2. That *it is rich, and exceedingly abundant.* It is worthy of the infinite Being who bestows it. We

read in Scripture of "great mercy,"—"abundant mercy,"—"tender mercy,"—and—"manifold mercies." God is said to be—"rich in mercy,"—"plenteous in mercy,"—and "to keep mercy for thousands." There is a fulness of mercy in God that is inexhaustible; riches of mercy that cannot be counted; multitude of mercies which cannot be numbered. Who can number the objects of mercy? Who can recount the mercies that every one of them has received? So that each of them may adopt the pious words of the Psalmist, "Many, O Lord, my God are the wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." Ps. xl. 5. And if such be the amount of mercies received by one individual, what must be the total sum of those received by a whole world! This has been the anchor of hope to myriads, who must else have perished in despair. This encouraged Moses to plead in behalf of Israel, when their destruction was threatened (Numb. xiv. 17) "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is long suffering and of great mercy, &c.—Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy: and the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word." In like manner, encouragement is offered to the almost despairing penitent (Ps. cxxx. 7). "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is *plenteous* redemption."

3. Let us add, that this mercy of God is *effectual*—effectual for the complete relief, and perfect salvation of those who obtain it. Mercy, in man, is often ineffectual: it is merely pity and compassion; it looks, and sighs, and offers words of sympathy and condolence, or pours forth prayers to the Father of mercies; but the case is too aggravated, the

object is too far gone to admit of relief from human hands: but the mercy of God is accompanied with infinite power; and there can be no perplexity so complicated, no danger so imminent, no distress so deep, in which his merciful hand cannot afford effectual relief. "Give us help from trouble, O God, for vain is the help of man:" "thy mercy is great above the heavens, and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds." Ps. cviii. 4, 12.

4. *The mercy of God is comprehensive*—that is, it includes, or is connected with, every other desirable good. The soul that requests it may say, "O *satisfy* us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." The blessing of pardoning mercy comes not alone! it is the first link in the golden chain of salvation; connected with all the rest, and insuring to the happy possessor, grace and glory; for no good thing will be withholden from the objects of mercy. "He that spared not his own Son," the chief mercy, the channel of all other mercies, "but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things!" This shews the unspeakable value of mercy!

5. *It is perpetual.* It always resides in God; in every age of the world he continues to display it; and wherever it is once bestowed, it shall never be withdrawn. In a psalm of praise, much used in the Jewish church, this attribute of God is peculiarly celebrated, and the perpetuity of divine mercy is repeatedly declared. Twenty-six times in that Psalm it is said, *His mercy endureth for ever.* Ps. cxxxvi. This was the chorus of a spiritual song, in which the various blessings of creation and Providence are recited, on account of all which it is said, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!"

Indeed, it has been the same in all ages of the world. All men have needed it, and millions have obtained it. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the patriarchs and prophets; the peni-

tents to whom John the baptist preached; the apostles and disciples of our Lord; and all believers from that day to this—all have sought, obtained, and praised God for his mercy. How richly was Mercy displayed in and by the Lord Jesus Christ! HIMSELF the chief Mercy; Mercy was incarnate in him. It was Mercy that brought him down from the throne of glory, and induced him to dwell in a tabernacle of clay; it was Mercy that led him to become a poor, despised man, and to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself; it was Mercy that nailed him to the cross, and laid him in the tomb; and he has risen to the throne of universal empire, with his heart as full as ever of mercy to sinful man. In the high office he sustains, as a Priest upon his throne, he forgets not the miseries of man: "for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities:" he who on earth, was tempted in all points as we now are, still retains a sympathetic heart; and is as ready to pity and relieve the poor sufferer as when, himself a traveller on earth, he went about doing good, exercising compassion, instructing the ignorant, healing the sick, and comforting the mourner. Having therefore such a high priest, "Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

And, blessed be God, this mercy once bestowed, shall never be withdrawn. "The gift and callings of God are without repentance." Were the objects of mercy left to themselves, to the deceitfulness of sin, and to the wiles of the temper, they would soon forfeit every blessing, and wander irrecoverably from God: but he who had mercy "because he would have mercy," has engaged, by covenant, to "put his fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from him; they shall therefore persevere in the good way of faith and holiness, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal

life;" then the final manifestations, fruits, and effects of his mercy shall appear, when a complete period shall be put to sin and sorrow, and his people shall enter into his glory, and sit down with him on his throne. Then, with an emphasis before unknown, the joyful song shall be shouted by myriads of voices, "O praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!"

And now, let us take care to improve, to practical purposes, this encouraging attribute of the divine Being. Does mercy belong to God? O *let us take care to seek it in time!* Do we not *need* it? Are we not very justly stiled, "Miserable Sinners?" Only "fools make a mock at sin." All thinking and serious persons will readily admit that they are sinners; and, as such, that they need mercy. But are our hearts affected with this conviction?—deeply affected?—durably affected? Some slight and transient thoughts of needing mercy, most men have at times, especially in the hour of affliction, and in the apprehension of death; but they soon pass off. No use is made of them. They do not lead to fervent prayer for mercy; and the general notions that some men have of mercy are sadly abused. They take encouragement to continue in sin, because they think that God is merciful, and they may obtain mercy whenever they please. But let such persons know, that this presumption is exceedingly displeasing to God. As he is infinitely merciful to penitent sinners, who are inclined to forsake their sins, so is he infinitely just to take vengeance on hard-hearted and impenitent transgressors, who presume upon his mercy. He hath said (Ps. lxviii. 21) "God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses;" and again he hath said (Ps. lix. 5) "He will not be merciful to any wicked transgressors." Again, he saith of him who cries, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination

of my heart—the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord shall smoke against that man." Deut. xxix. 20. Beware, then, of abusing mercy; and let not the present moment be neglected. To-morrow may be too late. "Now is the accepted time. To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Hereafter the door will be shut, and many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able. When God had shut Noah into the ark, there was no refuge for the drowning multitudes, who refused his calls to repentance. But now he saith, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isa. lv. 7. Only turn to God through Christ, and beg him to help you to do it. If you turn to the Lord, he will have mercy upon you. It is his own word. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy." Prov. xxviii. 13. If you will not come to Christ, you will not, cannot, have life; but coming to him, "you shall in no wise be cast out," but obtain mercy, and "the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse you from all sin."

The mercy of God affords great encouragement to prayer. In the temple of Solomon there was a *Mercy-seat*—this was the cover of the Ark, sprinkled with the blood of atonement, towards which all who offered up their petitions at the hour of prayer, turned their faces. Towards this seat of mercy the penitent Publican looked (in spirit at least) when he presented that humble but successful petition, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" We too have a "throne of grace," sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to which we are kindly invited with confidence to approach, "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need." A persuasion that God "is rich in mercy" to all who call upon him, will inspire us with holy boldness. This will furnish us with the Psalmist's plea,

"Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgments!" Again, he pleads, "Deal well with thy servant, according to thy mercy;" or, as another eminent believer pleaded, "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies."

Does mercy belong to God? *Then let humble believers trust and not be afraid.* Think highly, think largely of divine mercy. "He will *abundantly* pardon." He will *readily* pardon. His thoughts are not as man's contracted thoughts,—his ways are not as man's limited ways: but superior, as the heavens are above the earth. Enlarge, then, your views of the mercy of God. Cherish extended thoughts of his goodness; and say, with the Psalmist, "I will hope in thy mercy;" "I trust in the mercy of the Lord for ever;" and this will induce you to

Thank God for his mercy. Look back and consider how much you owe to mercy! How many dangers have you escaped! how many deliverances experienced! how many benefits received! Reflect on his *preventing* mercies; how many sins were you prevented from committing! his *providing* mercies; how constantly hath he supplied your returning wants! his *restoring* mercies, recovering you from the very borders of the grave! but, above all, think of his *pardoning mercies!*—how hath he "multiplied to pardon" your renewed and multiplied transgressions! O then "praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!" let the redeemed of the Lord (especially) say so, and add, "How precious are thy thoughts (of mercy) unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them; if I should count them, they are more than the sand." And when you reflect upon this vast profusion of mercies, reflect also on your total unworthiness of them, of any of them. What God has done for you, was not only *without* merit, but *contrary* to it. So far were you from deserving any favour, that you deserved his anger; he might not only have with-

held his blessings, but he might justly have punished your transgressions. Forget not then to make some grateful return for his favours." "They are new every morning." Let your praises be as frequently renewed. Offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and in the spirit of the patriarch Jacob, who had a long experience of the divine favour, say, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies!"

Finally, *Let us imitate divine mercy.* They who have obtained mercy, should certainly shew mercy. Such persons can never be covetous, hard-hearted, cruel, or oppressive. Shall he, to whom ten thousand talents have been forgiven, seize his brother by the throat for a few pence? It is impossible. If you forgive not men their trespasses, it is certain that you are not forgiven. But, on the contrary, Christians, "Put ye on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if a man have a quarrel against any. Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Such is the scriptural direction to those who have received mercy; and this will be the best evidence of having received it; for thus said he, who will be our Judge, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!"

SERMON LXXVI.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

2 Cor. xiii. 14. And the Love of God be with you all.

THESE words are a part of the benediction usually pronounced at the close of public worship in Christian congregations. They are the words of St Paul, in the conclusion of his second epistle to the church at Corinth, by which he expresses his best wishes on their behalf; as if he had said, "May the perpetual favour of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the constant and peculiar love of God the Father, and the most abundant communication of the Holy Spirit, in his gifts and graces, be with you, and remain with you, even with all the members of the church at Corinth!" "It is with great reason," says an eminent divine, "that this comprehensive and instructive benediction is pronounced just before our assemblies for public worship are dismissed; and it is a very indecent thing to see so many quitting them, or getting into postures of removal, before this short sentence can be ended."

That this excellent and desirable privilege, which St. Paul so fervently wished might be enjoyed by the Corinthian Christians, may be ours also, let us make it the subject of our devout meditations at this time; and "may the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit!" But, how difficult is it to conceive aright of the love of God! When we contemplate the firmament, and survey the starry

heavens, we are constrained, from a sense of our own insignificance, to exclaim, "Lord! what is man, that thou art mindful of him! The condescensions of divine Providence are also truly wonderful; but the special love of God to sinful men, as displayed in their everlasting salvation, is beyond all description;—it "passeth knowledge!"

Love, among mortals, is that affection of the human heart which inclines us to take delight in a chosen object, and to seek the good and happiness of that object. The love of God is that holy affection by which he condescends to take a pleasure in his chosen people, to confer special favours upon them, kindly to accept their persons and services, and to make them eternally happy. That such is the love of God to his church, is abundantly evident from the testimonies of his word, and from innumerable facts. Take a few of his own declarations.

He was pleased to select the posterity of Abraham from among all other nations, and to treat them with distinguished attention; concerning which he says (Deut. vii. 6—8), "The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth: the Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people (for ye were the fewest of all people); but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers;" and in (Deut. x. 15), "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you, above all people." It is also said (Ps. lxxviii. 68), "He chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved." It is written in another place (Ps. cxlvi. 8), "the Lord loveth the righteous." Particular persons are also described as the objects of divine love—"Jacob have I loved;" and our Saviour said to his disciples, "The Father himself loveth you."

But it is not by *words* merely, that God has ma-

nifested his love (though there is no difference between *his* professions and practices, as there too often is among men) he has evinced his love by the most valuable gifts, by the most generous and benevolent actions.

1. *God, in his infinite love, has given us his Son, his own, his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.*

Jesus Christ is the Son of God in a peculiar sense, in a much higher sense than any other being. Angels are called Sons of God—Adam was the son of God:—believers are also the sons of God; but Christ, in an infinitely higher sense, is the Son of God. He is called his *only-begotten* Son, which surely implies that he is partaker of the same *divine nature* with his Father. Jesus Christ had a being before he made his appearance in this world. God is therefore said to *send* his son into the world. And the acknowledgment of this was reckoned by St. John an important branch of the true Christian faith, for, says he (1 John iv. 2), "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is *come in the flesh*, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; this is that spirit of *Anti-Christ*—(that is, *against* Christ) which is already in the world. If we compare this expression, *Christ's coming in the flesh*, with the first chapter of St. John's gospel (verses 1st and 14th) we shall find that it affords a proof of the divinity of our Saviour; for the apostle there says, "In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God;" he also says (ver. 14th) "The WORD *was made flesh*, and dwelt among us." Christ, then, the Son of God, who *came in the flesh*, and *was made flesh*, or became man, is a divine Person, "the WORD, who was with God (the Father), and was God;" and being now man also, is God the Son—"Immanuel—God with us."

Here, then, is the most astonishing display of divine love!—"herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the pro-

pitiation for our sins." 1 John iv. 10. Well might St. Paul exclaim, "Thanks be to God, for his *unspeakable* gift!"

The degraded state of man, on whom this gift was bestowed, wonderfully enhances the love which bestowed it; for "when we were yet sinners, Christ" was born—lived, and "died for us." How deplorably is man fallen! what a horrible mixture of the brute and the fiend is exhibited in many of the children of Adam! Look at the frightful, but faithful picture, drawn by St. Paul in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans—a picture which too nearly resembles thousands still. Behold a rebel universe—our species up in arms against their God! See how men are "haters of God"—their carnal minds full of enmity against him; they reject his authority; they trample on his laws; they devote themselves to brutal lusts, depraved appetites, drunkenness, lewdness, unnatural vices, cruelty, oppression, murder,—and yet, hear it, O heavens! give ear and be astonished, O earth! for such, even for such vile and sinful rebels, God gave his only-begotten Son!

The love of God, in this gift, appears to be still more wonderful, when we consider the deep humiliation to which he was subjected. To have united the divine nature with humanity in any form, in the highest form, or under any circumstances, even the most glorious, would have displayed a condescension which can have no name, no parallel; but for the Son of God to submit to abject poverty; to live a life of constant self-denial; to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself; to bear with the vilest indignities and insults, and those in return for innumerable acts of kindness, and, to complete the scene, to be tried as a malefactor, to be unjustly condemned, to be barbarously mangled by cruel scourges, to be nailed like a criminal slave to the cross, there to agonize and to die,—and all this for guilty rebels!—O it is astonishing! no words of mortals can describe, no hearts of mortals can duly

conceive of that divine love which is the source of all this.

> " Let all the world fall down and know,
> That none but God such love could show !"

2. *Another method by which the love of God is manifested, is in the gift of his Word, his Gospel, by which we come to know his love; for without this, even the gift of his Son would have been of little avail.* He was pleased to dart into the minds of his prophets and apostles a ray of supernatural light. At sundry times and in divers manners he spake unto the fathers by the prophets; and to Jesus Christ they all bare witness; they testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; and, when all that they predicted had been accomplished, he inspired holy men to write the history of his birth, teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection, in what we call the Gospels. Others were equally inspired to write epistles to the first Christians, explaining at large the nature of that salvation which he had procured; the faith by which it becomes ours; the hope that we are warranted to indulge, and the holy temper and conduct which all believers must discover. " To *us* is the word of this salvation sent !" Let us prize it, according to its inestimable value; let us bind it to our hearts; let it be our meditation day and night; let it be sweeter to our taste than honey and the honeycomb, and more valuable than the gold of Ophir. It is the gift of divine love !

3. *Nor is the gift of the Holy Spirit less necessary than the gift of the Saviour himself, for without his enlightening, and renewing influences, we cannot savingly know or receive him.* His office is " to glorify Jesus ;" for which purpose " he takes the things of Christ and sheweth them to us ;" and God is said to give us his spirit, " that we may know the things which he hath freely given us." So necessary are his influences, that without them no man can say in

faith and in sincerity, "Jesus is the Lord." So necessary was it for the Spirit to descend on the church, that Christ said, "It is expedient for me to go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you;"—"and when he is come, he will guide you into all truth." Yea, so necessary is this gift, and the reception of it, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

4. *The love of God is further displayed in the forgiveness of sins.*

Among men, an enemy usually resents a great offence, aggravates its evil, and meditates revenge; but love is rather grieved, than angry, when an injury is committed; is disposed to pardon, and, perhaps, seeks an occasion to be reconciled to the offender. Such, and infinitely more, is the condescending love of our offended God. He who could, at any time, and by any means, take the deserved vengeance, stoops to send his messengers to assure us of his friendly disposition towards us; warns us of the danger of persisting in our rebellion; and "in Christ's stead they beseech us to be reconciled to him." This readiness to forgive, he has been pleased most pathetically to display in the charming parable of the Prodigal Son. There, the father of the once licentious youth, is represented as beholding with compassion his forlorn, his penitent, and returning son, while yet a great way off, and running, with eager haste, to receive and embrace him! Affecting emblem of divine love! Such is the readiness with which the Father of mercies will still receive all who forsake their sins, and return to him by Jesus Christ. "Verily, there is joy in Heaven over every sinner that repenteth," over every sinner that is pardoned; and in every such instance the love of God is glorified.

5. *God commendeth his love to us still more, in making the most abundant provision for our comfort and happiness in the present world.*

As parents are strongly attached to their children, and with pleasure provide them with food, and raiment, and education, and portions, so our heavenly Father kindly receives pardoned sinners into his family, and puts them amongst his children. "Behold!" saith St. John (observe it with the highest admiration), "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God!" Behold what provision he hath made for our souls! He gives us his holy Sabbaths, his blessed bible, his faithful ministers, his sacred ordinances, his precious promises. He holds intercourse with our spirits, admits us to communion with himself, allows us to tell him all our fears and all our desires, and assures us that he will withhold from us no good thing. He bids us dismiss all anxious concern, for he himself "careth for us;" he will be our guide; he will be our shield; he will make all things work together for our good, and will never, never leave nor forsake us! O what manner of love is this!

And "if he doth so much for us in the prison, what will he do for us in the palace!" We are yet minors. But "if children, then heirs,—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." Even now, believers are immensely rich. Read the unparalleled inventory of their wealth (1 Cor. iii. 21): "*All things are yours*"—*the world* is the first article—as much of the world as their Father sees good to bestow, and, indeed, *all the world* in a sense, for all things lead their minds to God; "they are steps by which they ascend to their Creator, for in them all, they view as in a bright mirror, his adorable perfections, and in that mediation exult.—Above all, they perceive in them the love of God towards them. When they view the sun, moon, and stars, they rejoice that their heavenly Father has lighted up so many tapers for them, at which they may work what becomes the sons of God: nor do they less admire these, than if every one of them had his

own sun, or his own moon, shining upon him. Indeed, "all things are for the elect's sake"—*life* and *death;* things present and things to come,—all are theirs, for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

6. *But all this is merely an* EARNEST *of the intended inheritance;*—"the first fruits of the Spirit;" for who can tell what God hath laid up and prepared for them in Heaven? Who can tell what vast powers they may possess, as superior perhaps to what they now enjoy, as the talents of angels are now superior to those of men? Who can tell what a glorious habitation they shall occupy?—their "Father's mansions" will be worthy of himself, and Jesus Christ, who is gone to prepare them, will come again and receive his people to himself, that where he is, they may be also. Who can tell what pleasant employments shall engage their improved and delighted spirits? Who can tell what blessed and glorious company they shall keep?—saints and angels will certainly be their associates, and "Christ himself shall be with them;" and they shall be "for ever with the Lord!"

Such are some of the *effects* of the love of God to men! But who can possibly describe it aright? A consideration, however, of some of its *properties* may a little assist our conceptions.

1. *It is everlasting*—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Jer. xxxi. 3. From before the foundation of the world, God foresaw the apostacy and misery of man, and determined to shew his love to the human race. The effects of this love were determined upon, and the peculiar objects of it were selected. They were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world," that "they should be holy, and without blame, before him in love;"—"they were predestinated to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace," so St. Paul expresses it in Eph. i.

4, 5, 6. How greatly does this enhance the value of the love of God, and fill with sacred admiration and astonishment the hearts of those in whom this love is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost: they are amazed to think that the great and glorious God should vouchsafe to think of *them;* of them, insignificant and rebellious creatures, and inscribe *their* unworthy names in the book of life!!!

2. *It is free and sovereign.* It is not fixed on particular persons on account of any foreseen excellency and superiority. Whatever be excellent in any person, is the *effect* of this love, and not its *cause.* All men are depraved, polluted, and undone. God was not bound to shew kindness to any one of Adam's fallen race; but, saith he (Rom. ix. 15), "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion;" and in another place, he saith, "I will love them freely." Hos. xvi. 4. If one man differ from another, it is grace that caused him to differ; and, therefore, to free grace is all the glory to be ascribed, as our Lord doth: (Luke x. 21) "I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

3. *The love of God is unchangeable.* The love of mortals is liable to much variation; not so the love of God; "he rests in his love:"—"having loved his own he loves them to the end." Their sense of it may vary, and God may hide his face; and he will do so, "if his children forsake his ways, and decline from his commandments; in love to their souls, "he will visit their transgressions with the rod," to bring them back again; "but his loving-kindness he will not take away, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail." Ps. lxxxix. 30. No,—"the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, saith the Lord of hosts, that hath mercy on thee." Isa. liv. 10.

IMPROVEMENT.

For the practical improvement of this subject, we propose the four following directions :—

1. *Believe the love of God*, according to what St. John saith (1 Eph. iv. 16): "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love." To know and to believe this, is to know and believe the whole gospel; for this is indeed the substance of it. The love of God is so exceedingly great, that it is said to "surpass knowledge;" but it does not surpass belief. We cannot fully *comprehend it*, for it is infinite; but we may *believe it* on the testimony of God himself; without which, such is its astonishing greatness, that it might have seemed incredible, but resting on the divine testimony concerning it, we may survey it with delight and pleasure; "its breadth and length, and depth and height," that "we may be filled with all the fulness of God."

2. *Receive the love of God.* It is proposed to us in the gospel as the grand attractive—that which is calculated to draw us away from sin and folly, and to raise our affections towards superior objects.—"God *commendeth* his love towards us"—he sets it before us, and recommends it to our notice, to raise our faith, our hope, our admiration, our love, and our joy, by this peculiar excellency of it—that "while we were yet *sinners*," he sent his dear Son into the world; who "gave himself a ransom" for our souls. Surely, this should draw our souls to God, and cause us instantly, and most thankfully, to receive the gifts of his love. Let us be encouraged to come to God, for God is love.

3. *Return the love of God*—make a suitable return for love so vast and so free. This was the first and great command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;" and

what can be so powerful an inducement to this as the astonishing love of God to us? Let us say with St. John, "We love him, because he first loved us;" —that is, *in consequence* of his having first loved us, without which we never should have loved him; and also, from a *view* and *sense* of his having first loved us. He is altogether lovely in himself, and we are under inexpressible obligations to his love; let us love him, therefore, supremely, and prove our love to him by keeping his commandments. "If ye love me," saith Christ, "keep my commandments." We cannot love him as we ought, nor as he deserves to be loved; but let us love him as we can, and daily lament that we love him no better. Let us prefer his glory above all that is dear to us, and be ready to part with all things for his sake. Thrice did our Lord propose the question to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" and thrice did the zealous apostle declare his attachment. Our Saviour then directed him how to demonstrate his affection—"Feed my sheep." In like manner, let us evince the sincerity of our regard to God, by a ready compliance with his whole will.

4. *Imitate the love of God.* Nothing can render man so truly amiable, as to resemble, in his humble measure, the God of love; and nothing can afford a brighter evidence of our being the objects of *his* love; for, by this, said Christ, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples—if ye have love one to another." This is Christ's *own* commandment,—his *new* commandment; old indeed in substance, but new in form, and enforced by a new obligation. "A new commandment give I unto you, That ye love one another. As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John xiii. 14. He has left among us suitable objects of Christian love—all his members, and especially those who need our care. "The poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always; and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God,

and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." 1 John iv. 7, 8. O let the love of God constrain us to cultivate every amiable temper, and to be forward in every act of kindness to the bodies and souls of men, and especially to all the sons and daughters of Affliction; for thus shall we resemble our heavenly Father, and our adorable Saviour, who, when he shall appear in his glory, at his second advent, will graciously accept and reward every "labour of love," saying, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

SERMON LXXVII.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.

1 Corinthians 1. 9: God is faithful.

EACH of the divine Perfections is necessary to the complete happiness of a Christian; not one of them can be dispensed with. That God is *Almighty*, and *Wise*, and *Holy*, and *Just*, and *Good*, is the joy of every believer's heart; but there is another perfection, in which the Christian seems to be (if possible) still more interested—that is, his TRUTH, or FAITHFULNESS: for the life of every real Christian, while in this world, is a life of faith; and as faith has respect to the word of God, his faithfulness to that word must be the principal ground of his faith and hope, and consequently of his joy, for his joy and peace are "in believing." There is nothing, therefore, which respects the divine character, that is more immediately connected with our Christian walk, than the *veracity* or *faithfulness of God*. The assertion of St. Paul in the text, furnishes us with a short, clear, and full proposition, which it shall be our present business scripturally to illustrate, and practically to improve.

GOD IS FAITHFUL.

Truth is essential to the very existence of God.—It is as impossible to conceive of a God without

truth, as of a God without power. Truth is therefore inseparable from his nature. The true God is truth itself. He is the first, chief, and greatest truth, and the source of all truth; so that all things are true or false, as they agree or disagree with their original patterns in the mind of God.

The value of truth is acknowledged by mankind in general. Fallen and corrupt as men are, they have not altogether lost sight of the value of truth: if destitute of it themselves, still they prize it in others. If they do not possess it, they wish to be thought to possess it. Hence no affront is reckoned so great as being called a Liar; it is deemed disgraceful, and so it ought to be deemed, for this is the character of the Devil himself: "He is a liar, and the Father of it." Most awfully do they resemble him, who speak lies; they "are of their father, the Devil, and the works of their father they will do." But the blessed God is infinitely true, and it is absolutely impossible for him to lie. The heathens themselves (in civilized countries) were sensible of the value of truth. One of their wise men said, that "if God should render himself visible to men, he would choose light for his body, and truth for his soul." The Romans built a temple which they dedicated to Truth, whom they called the Sister of Justice; and the most solemn oaths were taken in her name. Indeed, an oath is a kind of sacrifice offered to Truth.

What reason thus approves, Revelation abundantly confirms, and ascribes Truth to God as an essential perfection of his nature. Even Balaam, that wicked prophet, was constrained to say, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent" (or change his mind): "Hath he said and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numb. xxii. 19. He is called in Scripture "The God of Truth"—"The Lord God, abundant in Truth." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is also called, "He

that is true"—"faithful and true:" and the Holy Ghost is called "The Spirit of Truth." The extent and glory of this perfection is expressed in these lofty terms (Ps. xxxvi. 5) "thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds (or skies)."—"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations: I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens." "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee, or to faithfulness round about thee!" Ps. lxxxix. 1, 2, 8. The heavens and the heavenly bodies excite our admiration; we see, but cannot comprehend them; they are above our reach, and too large for our grasp: but they are emblems of the power, the mercy, and the truth of God: we see, we admire, we adore these divine perfections; but finite minds can never comprehend them.

The excellency of the divine faithfulness will more fully appear, when we perceive that it results from, or stands connected with all his other perfections.

1. *It is connected with his* POWER. Ps. cxlvi. 6. "He who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is therein—*He keepeth truth for ever.*" His almighty power enables him, without the possibility of failure, to accomplish all his promises and threatenings. Honest men, however desirous of keeping their word, may be prevented by the unexpected occurrences of insuperable difficulties; but the designs of the Almighty cannot be frustrated. "With God all things are possible." "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" said the reproving angel to the wife of Abraham, when her faith once staggered at the promise. Abraham himself was "strong in faith, giving *glory* to God"—the glory of his power and his fidelity combined, for "he was fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able to perform."—

Rom. iv. 21. In like manner, the apostle of the Gentiles feels perfect composure in the prospect of martyrdom, well knowing "whom he had believed," and being "fully persuaded that he was *able* to keep that which he had committed unto him." If Noah is to be preserved amidst a drowning world, if Israel is to be delivered from the Egyptian yoke, or to be sustained in a barren wilderness, or to subdue the warlike nations of Canaan, no obstacles shall prevent the promised events; infinite power and infinite faithfulness render them perfectly certain; wisdom prescribes the means; omnipotence makes them effectual; and God is faithful.

2. *The faithfulness of God is connected with his holiness;* indeed it is a branch of it,—without which he could not be holy. "There is no unrighteousness in him." "He cannot lie; it is impossible for God to lie." "He is not a man that he should lie." Lies are the wretched fruit of man's apostacy—his loss of the divine image, the corruption of his once holy nature: but God is unalterably holy; therefore it is said (Ps. lxxxix. 35) "Once have I sworn by my holiness (and I will not lie unto David) his seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me." Well, therefore, might the Psalmist say, "God hath spoken in his holiness: I will rejoice;" for thus the holiness of God is a pledge of his faithfulness.

3. *The faithfulness of God is necessary from his unchangeableness.* He is the only being absolutely and necessarily unchangeable. Angels have changed, and become devils; Man is changed, and become a rebel! but "I am the Lord," saith he, "I change not;" and it follows, as the blessed effect of his unchangeableness—"therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Mal. iii. 6. Men frequently change their minds, sometimes from good to evil, at other times from evil to good: their second thoughts are best; but God's thoughts can neither be improved nor depraved; they are originally, perfectly, unal-

terably good. It was the pride of the Medes and Persians that they would not alter their laws; it was on the proud presumption that they were so wisely framed as to admit of no improvement; but such, indeed, are the laws and the promises of God; "with him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning." The promises and vows of men (like Jephtha's and Herod's) are sometimes unlawful in themselves, or incautiously made, so that "there may be more honour in the breach, than in the observance of them." Not so the engagements of Heaven; they are all the product of that holy and wise mind which cannot err, and need not change. "He is of one mind, and what his soul desireth, that doeth he; he performeth the thing that is appointed for me." Job xxiii. 13, 14.

4. *The faithfulness of God is the result of his wisdom.* Among men, the non-performance of promises is frequently occasioned by circumstances which human prudence could not foresee, nor provide against; and therefore good men should not make promises hastily, and never without (at least a *mental)* reference to St. James's caution,—"Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." But no provisoes are necessary when God makes a promise; he has a perfect foreknowledge of every future event, however distant; he knows the end from the beginning, and perceives the connection of all things, though apparently trifling and casual, all which, instead of defeating his purpose, shall conspire to accomplish it. No difficulties, no disappointments can occur to him; his instruments are always at hand, and willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or ignorantly, they shall all subserve his holy designs. This affords no small encouragement to a reliance on his faithfulness.

5. The faithfulness of God may be contemplated, as connected with his mercy, his love, and his goodness. The royal Psalmist puts them together (Ps. cxxxviii. 2) "I will praise thy name for thy

loving-kindness and for thy truth, for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." His love inclines him to make the promise, and his veracity induces him to fulfil it: and it would be dishonourable to God to admit for a moment, the unjust supposition that he would disappoint the hope which his promise had excited: hence it is pleaded (Ps. cxix. 49) "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." The word of promise is the ground of hope; and it is by the grace of God a believer is enabled to make it such, to depend upon it, and expect its fulfilment; and will He who kindled the holy desire, and filled the soul with hope of the promised blessing, disappoint that hope? It is impossible. The Christian may humbly, yet boldly, say with David, when he pleaded a divine promise (1 Chr. xvii. 23) "Therefore, now, Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant be established for ever, and *do as thou hast said.*" Mercy and truth have met together, and they shall never part. Mercy invites, and Truth receives the sinner. Mercy makes the promise, and Truth stands ready to fulfil it: and the union of both shall call forth the Psalmist's song—"I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people; I will sing praises unto thee among the nations: for thy mercy is great above the heavens, and thy truth reacheth unto the skies." Ps. cviii. 4, 5.

6. Another consideration may confirm our confidence in the faithfulness of God.—The promises are made *in*, and *to Christ*, as the head of his church; and faithfulness to him, as well as to us, insures their fulfilment. St. Paul declares, in 2 Cor. i. 26, "All the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God, by us." Jesus Christ is the Surety of the new covenant, and he is deeply concerned in the fulfilment of the promises, for they are made to him, and to his people, in and through him. The persons who shall finally

be saved, are those of whom he says to the Father, "thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" and again, "I in them, and they in me, that they may be made perfect in one;" he also says, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." John vi. 37. We also read of "the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." Titus i. 2. Was not this promise made to the eternal Son of God, and to and for believers in him, their covenant head, before the earliest date of time, and of which he gave a specimen in the first promise immediately after the fall of man? All the promises then being made to Christ, the Mediator, respecting both himself and his people, shall be punctually fulfilled, "to the praise of the glory of his grace."

7. If any further consideration be needful to establish our faith in the faithfulness of God, let it be that wonderful condescension of his grace, whereby he is pleased to confirm his promise by an OATH. In this manner he was pleased to stoop to confirm the faith of Abraham, when the promise of a numerous posterity, so contrary to human appearances, was made to him. So St. Paul relates the matter (Heb. vi. 13): "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself," saying, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee;" in the book of Genesis it is, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord" (Gen. xxii. 16): and in like manner he is pleased to deal with Christian believers (Heb. vi. 17): "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath—that by *two* immutable things (in which it was impossible for God to lie) *we* might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us"—that is, upon Christ. In this most marvellous manner does the God of Truth vouchsafe to antidote our fears, and

put our unbelief to shame ; by this double security does he encourage our hope, and constrain us to say, as in our text, " God is faithful."

8. In the last place, and, if possible, still further to satisfy the most incredulous mind, let us call in to our aid *the experience of the people of God in all ages*. And here, what a cloud of witnesses might we summon to give their evidence in support of, what ought never to have been questioned,—the the faithfulness of Jehovah !

The first promise that God was pleased to make to his apostate creature, related to the Saviour, who, under the title of " the seed of the woman," was to " bruise the serpent's head," or, in other words, to " destroy the works of the devil." The fulfilment of this promise was deferred (we must not say delayed) for the long space of four thousand years ; and then, " when the fulness of the time was come,—the proper, the appointed time, neither sooner nor later, " God sent forth his Son, made of a woman," to be a Redeemer. With eager longings of holy desire, many successive generations looked forward to this grand event ; and when the moment arrived, fixed in the divine decree, the Saviour appeared. Let us remember that there is nothing like distance of time in the mind of God, between the promise and its fulfilment ; " a thousand years with him are as one day, and a single day is as a thousand years ;" and hence some events are spoken of in the prophets as present, or even as past, which are yet to come ; for God knows nothing of past or future, all is one eternal *now ;* and if he speak, it is done.

Was the universal flood threatened, and was Noah with his family to be secured ? The event corresponded with the threatening, though 120 years intervened ; and when that period of reprieve expired, " in the self-same day entered Noah into the ark." The world perished ; Noah was preserved ; and the word of the Lord, which cannot fail, was accomplished.

Was Abraham, when a hundred years of age, and childless, perhaps for fifty years after his marriage, to have one son, and descending from him, a vast posterity, like the stars of Heaven for multitude? Every thing like probability was against such an event; but Abraham had the fullest confidence in the power and faithfulness of Jehovah, and the promise was fulfilled; and every Jew we see is a witness of it.

Was Israel, long enslaved and depressed, to be freed from the Egyptian yoke? What though Pharaoh was proud and obstinate,—what though, after a reluctant consent, he pursued the fugitives with a mighty army,—what though rocks and mountains were on either hand, and the raging sea before them,—the promise could not fail!—the sea retires at God's command; it forms a wall on each side of them, and they pass through its dry channel in perfect safety; immediately after which, the waves, obedient to their Maker, resume their place, and overwhelm, with tremendous destruction, the affrighted host of Egypt. Thus Israel was taught that "God is faithful."

Pass on with these distinguished people into the deserts of Arabia, and rather than the promise of God shall fail, behold them sustained for the greater part of forty years, with food daily rained down from Heaven, and their thirst assuaged with water flowing from the flinty rock! But how are they to dispossess seven mighty and warlike nations, whose fortified cities were "walled up to heaven," and in whose eyes they thought "themselves like grasshoppers?" The terror of God fell upon these bold warriors; the walls of Jericho fell flat before the Israelites; and the land of milk and honey became an easy conquest. The overflowing Jordan recedes, and opens a ready passage into the hearts of the country, and then the faithfulness of God is thus proclaimed by his honoured servant Joshua: "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that

not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." Josh. xxiii. 14. Surely all the people would say, "God is faithful."

It would be easy to follow the Scripture history, and adduce a multitude of instances to the same effect, but our limits forbid, and these may serve as a sufficient specimen. We proceed to a practical

IMPROVEMENT.

1. From hence we may learn *the unreasonableness and sinfulness of unbelief.* Is the blessed God uniformly faithful to his word, whether of promise or threatening? What then is the crime of unbelief, but the denial of this—the denial of his truth and veracity—the charging him with falsehood? The apostle John, therefore, expressly says (1 John. v. 10), "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar;"—he who rejects the testimony of God in the gospel, who denies that "God hath given to us (believers) eternal life, and that this life is in his Son" (ver. 11) charges the truth of God with a falsehood; and can any blasphemy be more criminal? Let the example of the ancient Israelites be a warning to the world; for "unto them was the gospel (the good news) proclaimed"—the promise of the earthly Canaan; but not giving credit to the promise, God was offended, and "sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest;" "so then we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Our wisdom, therefore, is to profit by their punishment, and to hear, with faith, the voice of God in his gospel, "while it is called To-day;" for this is the solemn declaration of the God of truth: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John iii. 36.

2. *Let God be honoured in his faithfulness, by a suitable confidence in it.* The life of a Christian is a

life of faith. God's faithfulness, and our faith, are relative terms. His promises are the ground of our faith. Faith has a constant regard to them; and our expectation of their fulfilment rests upon the faithfulness of God in performing them, and will generally be proportioned to our belief of that faithfulness. It is said of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, in reference to the long-promised heir, that "she judged him faithful who had promised; that is, she did so *habitually*, though her faith, like that of most believers, sometimes fluctuated. "She judged him to be faithful," and therefore expected the promised blessing. This, then, is the point. Do we, or do we not, judge a promising God to be a faithful God? If we do, we shall experience some degree of "joy and peace in believing:" if we do not, doubts and fears will burden our minds, and cloud our prospects. By believing that God is faithful, we shall obtain peace, and in no other way. "Said I not unto thee" (that is, to Martha, at the grave of her brother Lazarus) "said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" And so the Lord speaks to us—If thou canst credit my testimony, rely on my promises, and trust my faithfulness to make them good to thee, thou shalt see my glory; thou shalt have my peace, which passeth understanding, to keep thy heart and mind, while in this vale of tears; and thou shalt hereafter be with me where I am, behold my glory, and share in it for ever. Has not each of us reason to say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!"

Finally, Let us, in our humble measure, try to imitate the blessed God in this his glorious attribute; let us be "followers (imitators) of God as dear children;" let us imitate him in faithfulness. Even a heathen philosopher (Pythagoras), when asked, "What makes men like God?" answered, 'Their speaking the truth.' Let not Christians be worse than heathens. Many, alas! called Christians, are so! The wicked are in the constant habit of lying;

" they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. lviii. 3) and in this practice they resemble him who is " the father of lies ;" and without repentance and pardon, all " liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Rev. xxi. 8. But from this vain and wicked conversation every true believer is redeemed. God's children are described (Isa. lxiii. 8) as lovers of truth :—" Surely, they are my people, children that will not lie." Let this be our character. Let us, as directed by the apostle, " speak every man truth with his neighbour." Above all, let the faithfulness of God to us, constrain us to be faithful to him. We are engaged by baptism, profession, and self-dedication, to be the Lord's ; " let us, then, hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; for he is faithful who hath promised."

SERMON LXXVIII.

GOD, WITH ALL HIS PERFECTIONS, THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD.

Psalm xlviii. 14. For this God is our God, for ever and ever.

THE glorious perfections of Deity form the subject of this volume; in which, after an introductory discourse on the importance of the knowledge of God, we have made a feeble attempt to display the *power*, the *wisdom*, the *holiness*, the *justice*, the *omnipresence*, the *patience*, the *sovereignty*, the *goodness*, the *mercy*, the *love*, and the *faithfulness* of God; and now, what remains but to exult in this glorious Being, and to say, in the triumphant language of the Psalmist, "This God is *our* God, for ever and ever!"

These words conclude a hymn of praise, composed, probably, on occasion of some eminent victory; but, undoubtedly, applicable to the glories of the gospel-church. The psalm begins with a declaration of the greatness of God, as he manifested himself in Sion. The situation of the temple, which was remarkably beautiful, afforded a suitable emblem of the Christian church, in which true happiness may certainly be found; there, the love of God in Christ is manifested and enjoyed, and there he presides for its infallible protection; and the Psalmist concludes with the words of our text, exulting in such a God, and in his interest in him, with the security it affords through life, to its termination. These words furnish us with a good conclusion to these discourses

on the Divine Perfections, and it shall be our present business to prove that

It is the unspeakable privilege of believers, that God, in Christ, is their own God, and will be so for ever.

A pious Jew, in ancient times, looking on all the nations around him, and beholding the heathen bowing to their pretended gods of wood and stone, would pity their stupidity; but contemplating the God that made the heavens, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel, glorious in holiness, venerable in praises, and doing wonders, would, with sacred joy exclaim, "THIS God is our God!"—"great is OUR God above all gods!"

The believer in Christ enjoys this privilege also; for it is the grand blessing of the covenant of grace, as mentioned by St. Paul, in the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews (ver. 10): "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel," (that is, with the church of Christ) "I will put my laws in their mind, and write them on their hearts, and *I will be to them a God*, and they shall be to me a people."

A covenant is either an *agreement* or an *appointment*. Covenant, in this place, signifies *an appointment*—a gracious appointment made by God himself, in behalf of all real Christians; the *New* covenant, in distinction from the *Old* covenant, made with the nation of Israel at Sinai, which consisted chiefly in precepts, prohibitions, and emblems of future blessings to be revealed in the gospel. This covenant was given by Moses, "but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In the new covenant, or appointment, we have chiefly PROMISES—promises of all spiritual blessings, in and through Christ Jesus. One of these promises is "They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest," ver. 11. The importance of this blessing was shewn

in the Introductory Sermon; and the design of all the following discourses is to promote the knowledge of God, in all his glorious perfections; but the chief blessing of all is,—"I will be *their God.*" This comprehends all good things; it includes all that can be needed or desired; yea, infinitely more than "we can ask or think." We justly admire the perfections of God—what he is, *in himself;* but how much more admirable is it, to have a personal interest in him,—to know that he is all this to, and for his people; so that they may boldly say, "This God is *our* God!"

But let it be observed, that it is only *in*, and *through Jesus Christ*, that he becomes *our God.* He does not transact with man *immediately*, but through a Mediator: "No man cometh to the Father but by him;" and, through him, God the Father cometh to men. "God was *in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself." Hence the name of the Saviour is "IMMANUEL"—that is, "God with us." As Immanuel, he is God in our nature; God engaged in our behalf; and manifested for our salvation. Through faith in his blood, the sinner comes to God, and obtains the pardon of all his sins, which is another blessing of the covenant, mentioned in ver. 12, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." And by the influence of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every believer, a separation from the world is effected, and a life of communion with God commenced, which shall never end; according to the promise recorded in 2 Cor. vi. 16, &c. "God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Truly happy, then, are all believers in

Christ; having come to God, through faith in him, they are divinely authorised to adopt the words of the text, "This God is our God!"

In ancient times, long before the brighter discoveries of the gospel were afforded, we find some eminent believers distinguished as having a special interest in God. Jehovah, who, by his sovereign grace, called Abraham from among the idolaters of Chaldea, was pleased to style himself "the God of Abraham." By this name he made himself known to Moses at the burning bush, when he was about to deliver the posterity of Abraham from their bondage in Egypt. He called himself also, at the same time, "the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. iii. 6); and thus he encouraged the children of Israel to expect that the promises made to their fathers should certainly be accomplished.—In like manner, New Testament believers are more clearly taught to expect a future and eternal inheritance in Heaven; "wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called *their God*, for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. xi. 16): as if it had been said, God would be ashamed to be called *their God*, if nothing more than the good things of this life were given them; especially as it is the lot of far the greater part of them to be poor and afflicted in the present world; but, having "prepared for them a city," a glorious habitation, even "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" he is not ashamed,—he thinks it no dishonour to be, and to be called *their God* and Father. "This," saith he, as if exulting in the relation, "this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." Exod ii. 15. God's relation to his people is what *he* will ever remember, let us then never forget it; never neglect to take the comfort, nor to give him the glory of it.—It is God's memorial; let it be ours.

We find Moses, the faithful servant of the Lord, glorying in his relation to God (Exod. xv. 2), "The

Lord is my strength and my song, and he is become my salvation; he is *my* God, and I will prepare him a habitation; my *father's* God, and I will exalt him." As this was part of the song composed on occasion of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea, Moses may perhaps allude to the name of God, as "the God of Abraham;" such indeed he proved himself to be, to his posterity. Thrice happy is he who, celebrating a still greater salvation than that of Israel, can sing—"He is *my* God, and my *father's* God; I will exalt him!"

In the book of Psalms, we frequently meet with this sweet appropriation of the name of God. The Psalmist speaks thus——"thou art my God, from my mother's womb;"—"I trusted in thee, I said, Thou art my God;"—"I will sing praise unto thee;"—"I will extol thee, my God, O King, and bless thy name for ever!"

Daniel, also, had good reason to own his relation to God, when the king, who had caused him to be thrown into the den of lions, asked, with a lamentable voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" The praying man of God replied, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion's mouth.' Such was the impression produced by this exertion of divine power in behalf of the prophet, that Darius required that all his subjects "should tremble and fear before *the God of Daniel.*"

We might multiply instances of this kind; but let us rather pass on, and shew more particularly that the several attributes of the blessed God, which have been surveyed in the preceding sermons, afford abundant occasion to the believer to rejoice in his relation to Jehovah, and triumphantly to say, "This God is my God!"

Our God is *Almighty.* Is any thing, then, too hard for him? Whatever he hath promised he is able to perform; and he hath performed such won-

ders in the fulfilment of his promises to his ancient people the Jews, and to all his believing people ever since, that unbelief may blush to suspect he will ever fail to accomplish with his hand, what he hath spoken with his mouth. Remember his mighty works in the creation of the world; in the preservation and government of the world; and in his marvellous interposition in behalf of his people: the waters shall not drown, the sun shall not set, the fire shall not burn, lions shall not devour, when he forbids; and if he give the word of command, bread shall descend from Heaven, water shall flow from the rock, devouring birds shall feed the prophet, five loaves shall satisfy five thousand people, and the dead shall come forth from their graves. What cannot he do for his friends? and should they not say, This God is our God; and, If God be for us, who can be against us?

Our God is WISE—he is Wisdom. What a privilege then it is to be under his direction! and this *is* the privilege of his people, as it follows immediately after the words of our text—"He will be our Guide, even unto death;" he will direct our steps through this mazy wilderness, nor forsake us when we die, but conduct us safely through Jordan to the possession of the promised rest. Well may we "cast our cares upon him," if we believe that "he careth for us."

> "Since all the downward tracts of time,
> God's watchful eye surveys,
> O! who so wise to choose our lot,
> And regulate our ways?"

Our God is HOLY; unlike the pretended deities of the heathen, who were abominably impure, the patrons and patterns of infamous vices; so that we may say with exultation, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like unto thee, *glorious in holiness?*" A wicked man, wishing to indulge his sins, might wish that God were like him-

self, and would wink at his impurity; but a Christian rejoices in the holiness of God; it keeps him low in his own eyes; it makes him hunger and thirst after righteousness; and encourages the hope that his holy God will, by all his ordinances and all his dispensations, make him "a partaker of his holiness."

Our God is JUST. Shall he not then always do right? It is the glory of the gospel, and that which renders it peculiarly satisfactory to the mind, that therein God has manifested his justice no less than his mercy—"he is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." The Christian, then, has nothing to dread, but every thing to hope from this attribute. He who said to Abraham, on leaving his native land, "I am thy shield," said also, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Nothing can possibly be lost by adherence to Christ and his cause; God is not unrighteous, so that he should forget the work of faith and the labour of love; he that soweth to the spirit shall reap of the spirit; and God, the righteous Judge, will, at the great day, bestow the crown of righteousness on every one who was faithful unto death. How joyfully shall every conqueror, on receiving that crown, exult, This righteous God is my God!

Our God is OMNIPRESENT. Pleasing reflection to the Christian! Wherever he is, God is there,—in the closet, in the church, in the world; at home, abroad; by sea or land; amongst friends or foes, Christians or Infidels; in prosperity or in adversity, God is there. The salutary thought bridles the unruly tongue, restrains the rovings of the eye, repels the intruding thoughts of sin, and quenches the fiery darts of temptation. It stills the rising murmur of impatience, corrects the mistakes of unbelief, and enables the soul to endure, "as seeing him who is invisible."

Our God is PATIENT. It is well for the world, it is well for *us*, that he is so. It was justly remark-

ed, by an old divine, that if the most tender-hearted man in the world were to sit down on the throne of God, for a single hour, and behold, as God continually does, the provoking abominations committed by men during that hour, he would undoubtedly, in the next, set the world on fire and destroy it. "But he is God, and not man, therefore we are not consumed." Let us not abuse this amiable perfection by continuing in sin, but rejoice that this patient God is our God, and learn from him to be patient too.

Our God is SOVEREIGN; he doth as he pleaseth, among the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. Let us glorify him as such; even when we cannot account for his sovereign proceedings. Thus did the apostle Paul, when he had contemplated the calling of the Gentiles, and the rejection of the Jews, with their future restoration—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! And how much reason has every believer to admire the divine sovereignty, for to this he ascribes his personal salvation. "By the grace of God I am what I am." He alone "made me to differ" from the most abandoned wretch on earth; O to grace how great a debtor am I! "bless thou the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Our God is GOOD, and doeth good. Well may man say so; man so highly favoured in his structure, in the powers of his mind, in his superiority over the creatures, in his immortality, and above all, in his redemption by the Son of God. God is indeed in a vast variety of respects "good to all;" "his tender mercies are over all his works," and "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." O that men, O that *all* men, would praise the Lord for his goodness; but let them especially do so, who have a special interest in his favour; let them shout for joy, and say, This *good* God is *our* God, for ever and ever!

Our God is MERCIFUL.—"Mercy *belongeth* to him," it is his prerogative, his peculiar excellency, one of the brightest jewels of his crown; it is his delight, it is his glory. Now, every believer, like converted Saul of Tarsus, hath "obtained mercy;" and who can sufficiently prize it?—it is great mercy, rich mercy, free mercy, manifold mercy, matchless mercy, infinite mercy, yea, eternal mercy! O praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever! Well may the pardoned sinner cry, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Micah vii. 18.

Our God is LOVE. This is the most amazing perfection of all; the love of such a glorious and holy Being, to creatures so degraded and defiled by sin! Surveying this, we are astonished; and try, but in vain, to measure its vast dimensions—its breadth, its length, its depth, and its height; it surpasses, by infinite degrees, the most advanced knowledge of saints and angels; yet, in a sense, it is apprehended, it is enjoyed, it is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit; and then indeed the Christian may triumphantly cry, This God is my God, for ever and ever!

Our God is FAITHFUL. This crowns the whole. He is faithful to his promises; and his promises ensure the final salvation of every believing soul. He has engaged never to "forsake the work of his own hands;" and, by putting "his fear in the hearts of his people," he has engaged that "they shall not forsake him." Hence, our text celebrates the permanence of the privilege enjoyed—"this God is our God—FOR EVER *and* EVER"—terms which in Scripture always signify that which is positively eternal. What a portion then is that of the believer! The landlord cannot say of his fields, these are mine for ever and ever. The king cannot say of his crown, this is mine for ever and ever. These pos-

sessions shall soon exchange masters; these possessors shall soon mingle with the dust, and even the graves they shall occupy, may not long be theirs; but it is the singular, the supreme happiness of every Christian to say, or to have a right to say, "This glorious God, with all his divine perfections, is my God, for ever and ever, and even death itself shall not separate me from his love."

IMPROVEMENT.

It may be truly said of the wicked—They have no God. They may have wealth, and wit, and friends; but they are without God in the world; they are therefore miserably poor, and in the way to be miserable for ever. At present, you may contrive to fill up your fleeting moments with the business and pleasures of a transitory world, banishing God as far as you are able from your thoughts. Thus you may *live;* but how will you *die?* for die you must, and may die soon: and remember, that after death comes the judgment. At the dread tribunal of God, what are you to expect? From which of his divine perfections can you hope to gain advantage? Perhaps you will say, From his mercy. But know this, that it is not at the bar of judgment that mercy is to be dispensed. *This* is the world, this is the *time*, for Mercy; and if not now sought, through Jesus Christ, it will be refused when sought hereafter. O seek it now! Delay is dangerous; it may be fatal. You have not a moment to lose. Lament your neglect of God hitherto, and cry with all your might, 'God be merciful to me a sinner;' for how tremendous would be your state, if you should see all the people of God around the throne, shouting, 'This God is our God, for ever and ever,' while you, justly banished to an awful distance, and doomed to eternal darkness, must be constrained to say, Alas! alas! this God is not my God, nor will be mine for ever and ever. May divine grace prevent so horrid a condition!

And now, methinks, every serious person present will be putting this question to his own conscience, Is this blessed privilege mine? May I say, This God is my God?

I answer, Do you consider this as the most desirable of all good things?—do you prefer it, infinitely prefer it? Compared with this, do wealth and pleasure, friends and relations, the whole world, appear a trifle? Can you adopt the words of the Psalmist, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside (or in comparison of) thee?" If you see the value of having God as yours, this will be your deliberate language.

Wishing that God may be yours, do you come to him, in the only way that you can come, through faith in Jesus Christ? and thus coming, can you, and do you, renounce the idol of self-righteousness, accounting all things but loss that you may be accepted in Christ? Do you *yield* yourself to him,—gladly forsaking your vain companions, and sinful pleasures, and willing to part with the world for his sake?—for you cannot have *two* gods; you cannot serve God and Mammon. Do you give up soul, body, and spirit to him, as your reasonable service, determined, by divine grace, to serve him faithfully, and follow him fully, all your days? to *obey* him as your God? to *submit* to him as your God? to *love* him, and to *glorify* him, as your God? ——If so, you may be permitted to say, and you will say it most humbly and thankfully, "This God is my God." Happy the man that is in such a state, happy is he who hath the Lord for his God, whose hope the Lord is! Happy Christian, thou art indeed "rich, and increased in goods, and standest in need of nothing" more to make thee happy. Divine *Power* protects thee, *Wisdom* guides thee, *Holiness* sanctifies thee, *Justice* secures thee, *Omnipresence* surrounds thee, *Patience* will not be pro-

voked at thee, *Sovereignty* hath chosen thee, *Goodness* enricheth thee, *Mercy* forgives thee, *Love* delights in thee, and *Faithfulness* will conduct thee safely to Heaven, and place the crown of glory on thine head. Then, amidst ten thousand saints and angels, thou shalt exult in the matchless privilege, and say, "This God is my God, and he will never cease to be mine! This God is my God, for ever, and ever, and ever!" Amen and Amen.

SERMON LXXIX.

JESUS CHRIST, AN INCOMPARABLE TEACHER.

John vii. 46. Never man spake like this man.

"THE tongue is a little member, but it boasteth great things;" and, indeed, great things have been effected by it. Orators, generals, advocates, senators, and preachers, have produced wonders by their speeches; but the greatest and best of them all is not to be compared with him of whom the words of our text were, in an extacy of admiration, spoken.

The pharisees and chief priests, who had determined to reject all the evidence that Jesus gave of his divine mission, alarmed at his growing popularity, took measures to apprehend and silence him. Many people, it appears, had already believed on him, and were suitably impressed with the wonders he had wrought, so that they openly said, "When Messias cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?" The rulers therefore determined upon making him their prisoner, sent officers to take him, and were waiting with the expectation of gratifying their malice by seeing him arraigned at their bar. But how were they disappointed, when the officers returned without their expected prisoner! and when asked why they had not brought him, they answered, in the words of the text, *Never man spake like this man!* What could have been more honourable to the character of our Lord than this report! Plutarch

mentions it as a memorable proof of the extraordinary eloquence of Mark Antony, when soldiers were sent to kill him, that he pleaded for his life in such affecting language, that he totally disarmed them of their resolution, and melted them into tears. But these officers are vanquished, not by the forcible arguments of a man pleading for his life, but by hearing one of the ordinary discourses of our Lord, not particularly directed to them, but to the people at large, which is a circumstance much more remarkable. They returned to their employers in amazement, and without attempting an apology for their failure, they broke out into the pathetic language of the text, Never man spake like this man!

The observation they made upon our Lord's discourse was certainly just, and imported more than they were aware of, and what we are better able than they were to express. They heard him but once, and that perhaps not for an hour, but how many of his discourses, committed to writing by men inspired of God, and handed down to us, have we read and heard: and if we heard them with understanding, and mixed them with faith, we have much more reason than they had to say, Never man spake like this man!

In order that we may more fully perceive the reason of this, and learn still more highly to prize his heavenly teaching, let us consider and illustrate the following observation:

Jesus Christ is incomparably the greatest and best teacher the world ever knew.

It is fit and becoming, "that in all things He may have the pre-eminence;" for he is the first and the last, the Almighty. In every character that he assumes, which, for the sake of our feeble minds, is compared to something human, he discovers infinite superiority, for he is the source of all that is excellent and admirable in the best of those

human characters to which he condescends to be compared: and well may it be allowed that he spake as never man spake, who himself made man's mouth, endowed him with the admirable faculty of speech, and who furnished the finest orators in the world with all their most brilliant talents.

Is he, for instance, a King?—Yes, he is "the King of kings, and the Lord of lords," and his kingdom ruleth over all; his reign is the most pacific; his subjects are the most happy; his government the most equitable; his influence the most extended; and his kingdom that which shall never have an end.

Is he a Priest?—Yes; but far greater than Aaron. Jesus offered a sacrifice, but it was only once; it was once for all; a sacrifice, that needed no repetition, like that of ordinary priests, but it was at once a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, not for Jews only, but for all of every country and in every age who shall believe on him.

Is he a Prophet?—Yes; and such a one as the world never before heard. "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the ordinary prophets," and among them, we highly venerate the names of Moses and Abraham, Isaiah and Elijah, and John. But a greater than any of these is here; and if we regard this holy prophet aright, we shall have good cause to say, Never man spake like this man! And this will plainly appear if you consider three things.

The Matter—the Manner—and the Effect of his Instructions.

Let us first consider the *Matter* of his instructions.—What was it that he taught? And here we shall find none of that wretched trifling, which distinguished the scribes, and pharisees, and rabbies, among the Jews, some specimens of which our

Lord has given in order to expose them.—No, our Lord's discourses were grave, solid, and of eternal moment; for instance,

He truly revealed the divine character.—He who was from eternity "in the bosom of the Father," and had an intimate acquaintance with the whole mind and will of God, "he hath revealed him; he hath manifested the divine name and nature to the men who were given him out of the world," and qualified them to be the instructors of mankind. Doubtless there is more of the true knowledge of God displayed in one single discourse of our divine Redeemer, than in all the volumes composed by heathen sages.

Again, He fully explained the Will of God, as revealed, long before, in the moral law. In the ten commandments, we have the will of God in epitome—we have "the root of the matter;" but in the discourses of Christ, we have the spiritual meaning and extent of the law—we have the lofty tree, with all its extended branches. The Jews had the law, but it was miserably expounded to them by their teachers, who not only dwelt chiefly on its outward rites and ceremonies, neglecting the weightier matters, but by their wretched traditions set aside the design of it. With what authority did our Lord correct these dangerous mistakes, and point out the true and spiritual meaning of the law, particularly in his Sermon on the Mount. We find him also insisting upon the spiritual nature of that worship which God requires, and which alone he will accept. He shewed that it was not merely worshipping in the holy place at Jerusalem, nor the mere use of divinely appointed means, but that God, who is a Spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; that the washing of the outside of the cup and the platter was of little moment: he insisted upon the religion of the heart; he shewed the necessity of private prayer, of closet devotion, and of a purity of motive in all our religious actions; he shewed that the kingdom of

heaven came not with observation and outward shew, as the Jews expected, but that it was of an *internal* nature, and consisted in peace and righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost; he shewed men that love is the very essence of true religion—love to God and love to man; and how admirable were our Lord's precepts with regard to the love of our neighbour! In his parable of the good Samaritan, he shews that we ought even to treat our enemies with kindness, and melt them down by acts of friendship.

But especially did the superiority of our Lord's preaching appear in the display he made of the divine mercy, of the love of God to sinful men, in the gift of his only begotten Son, who came into our world to die for them! With what heart-cheering words did he open his commission at Nazareth, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." The prophets usually came to men with heavy tidings, called, The burden of the Lord, denouncing curses upon the disobedient; but our blessed Lord opened his mouth with blessings upon the poor, the meek, the mourners, the pure in heart, and even on those who were persecuted for righteousness sake—characters far from being generally deemed happy: and how divinely sweet and consolatory were the gracious sayings that dropped from his lips—such as "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost,"—"the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"—"Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Again, Jesus unveiled the invisible and eternal world. Hitherto little had been disclosed. The

patriarchs indeed sought a better country than Canaan—a heavenly world, yet they were not favoured with such a discovery of its excellencies and glories as was made by the mouth of Jesus, who came down from heaven on purpose to direct men thither. By him the immortality of the soul was fully and plainly asserted. "Fear not them," said he, "who can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." He plainly taught the nature of the future world, and the existence of the soul in a separate state from the body, as when he said to the penitent thief on the cross, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." He taught the final separation of those characters who are united in the visible church—the wheat and the tares—the good and bad fishes—the wise and the foolish virgins, a separation of whom shall be made in the great day. But,

II. The superiority of our Lord's instruction appears in the *Manner*, as well as in the matter of it.

He taught more clearly than any one who had gone before him. The gospel truths which were revealed in the Old Testament were described as "shadows of good things to come," but the body is Christ. The writings of the prophets are frequently obscure, for they themselves were imperfectly acquainted with the import of their own prophecies; but our Lord's teaching was like a morning without clouds, like the rising of the sun, with healing in his wings. The light of the Gospel broke through the obscurity of the law. How sweetly familiar were the instructions of our Lord in parables; in the manner of fables, he conveyed the great truths of religion—a pleasing mode of instruction, well adapted to both classes of his hearers: for the teachable easily perceived the drift of his discourses, or if they knew it not, they humbly asked to be informed; while those proud

opposers, who only sought to cavil, found enough to become stumbling blocks to their own ruin. You remember our Lord's parable of the sower, to shew the different effects of the preached word, and his setting a little child in the midst of his disciples to teach them humility.

Our Lord's teaching was also distinguished by the mild and affectionate manner of it. Indeed, he courts the attention of his disciples upon this ground. "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly in heart,"—no forbidding—no philosophic or priestly haughtiness, but waiting to be gracious, and willing to diffuse knowledge; he was indulgent in all his behaviour, even to his dull disciples, and gentle to his bitterest enemies. Paul speaks of "the gentleness of Christ," and "the bowels of Christ." How pathetic were his lamentations over Jerusalem! and how charming his farewell discourse to his disciples!

Again, our Lord taught the people *faithfully*. He honestly told his disciples what they were to expect, if they became his followers—that they must deny themselves, and take up their cross! that they would not, perhaps, have accommodation equal to the foxes of the wilderness, or the birds of the air; but they must look for divisions and discord, and evil speakings; yea, for death itself. He also plainly forewarned men of their danger; he boldly exposed the ignorance and hypocrisy of the Pharisees; he warned men against them as the blind leaders of the blind, lest both should fall into the ditch.

How *zealous* also was our Lord in giving these instructions! he was like a man in earnest, who felt the importance of what he taught. "The zeal of thine house," says he, "hath eaten me up—hath even consumed me!" insomuch that his own relatives suspected his sanity, and intimated that he was beside himself.

Observe also how *majestically* he spoke. Never man before could speak like him. Even the com-

mon people observed that he spoke with authority, and not as the scribes. The dignity of his manner, and the weight of his discourses, constrained his hearers to say, Never man spake like this man! And this will appear still more clearly, when we consider,

III. *The grand effect of his teaching.*

He who spoke on earth in this astonishing manner, was no less a person than he who said at the creation of the world, 'Let there be light, and there was light." Powerful was the effect of our Lord's word on things inanimate. When the tempestuous wind fiercely raged, and the waves of the sea threatened instant destruction, it was only for him to say, "Peace, be still," and there was a great calm.

Demons, who at that time obtained permission to possess the bodies of men, and grievously tormented them, were banished with a single word, and the poor demoniacs were found sitting at his feet in their right mind.

And with respect to men—what power accompanied his words! Did he command the fishermen of Galilee to forsake their nets and their boats, or did he command the wealthy publican to leave the receipt of custom, they instantly comply, forsake all their occupations and possessions, and immediately join his humble train. Did atrocious sinners mingle with the multitude who flocked to hear him preach, one word from our Lord, spoken to their hearts, changed them in a moment. She who had been an atrocious sinner, a person of notorious character, follows Jesus even into the house of a Pharisee, bedewing his feet with the tears of penitence, and wiping them with the hair of her head! Zaccheus, before an extortioner, hears Jesus invite himself to his house, receives him gladly, and, changed by his grace, immediately became another man. Who but Jesus could have

dared to say to a weeping penitent, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee?" Can any forgive sins but God only?

And still his word (and the preached Gospel is his word) produces, by the power of the Holy Spirit, similar effects. For what purpose was the Gospel ordained? "To open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and to translate them from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in him." Our Lord declares what should be the grand effect and influence of his Gospel; "The hour cometh," said he, "and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live." And thus it proved to the Ephesians; they were originally "dead in trespasses and sins," but they were "quickened" by the word of the Lord Jesus. So it was with the Corinthians: they had been wallowing in every sort of vice, but "they were washed, they were justified, they were sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints;" they became new creatures—old things passed away—all became new.

St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter the 14th, verse the 24th, describes the manner in which this great change was in the primitive times frequently effected. Speaking of the religious assemblies of the first Christians, where the word of the gospel was preached—"there cometh in one," saith he, "that believeth not, or one unlearned"—ignorant of Christ and the Gospel, and "he is convinced of all; he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is with you of a truth;" —the person described, came in, it may be as a spy, or merely to mock at what he might hear; but, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the word touches his heart; he is convinced of his sin and danger; he renounces his former idolatry; becomes a spi-

ritual worshipper of the true God; and is convinced, from what he feels, that the people, whom before he despised, are indeed the people of God, and that his presence is among them.

The power that produces this conviction, and this mental revolution, is and must be divine, and St. Paul ascribes it to the same creative voice, which at the beginning said, "Let there be light, and light there was." Speaking to the same church of the Corinthians (2d Epistle, ch. 4. ver. 6.) he says, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What a grand idea does this give of the power of divine grace on the souls of men! It is the voice of him that spake the most glorious creatures into being, that speaks to the heart, and bids the light of the gospel enter. It is Jesus, by whom all things were originally made, and without whom nothing was made, who is the author of the new creation in the soul of man: and, blessed be God, the same effects are still produced, though rarely so suddenly and so visibly, yet as really and truly by the ministry of the Gospel of Christ, of which, we trust, there are amongst us more than a few living witnesses.

To conclude. What has been said may, we trust, excite our admiration, and constrain us to use the language of the text, Never man spake like this man! But this is not enough; let us be anxious to hear him ourselves; each of us for himself to receive his word. It will little avail us to know, that nearly 1800 years ago a distinguished person spake as never man spake, unless we know that we have heard his voice and have believed in his name. For, be it observed, that still Christ speaketh to us, according to Hebrews xii. 25.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh, for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh *from heaven*, whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also the heavens."

When our Lord made his appearance on earth, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, *hear ye him!*" And again, "This is the Prophet that God promised to raise up, *hear him;* and it shall come to pass, that if any one will not hear that prophet, he shall be cut off from among the people." —Doubtless Christ still speaks to us by his blessed word; let us then beware of the sin and danger of rejecting him, for as it is written in the 12th chapter of St. John's Gospel, and the 48th verse, "He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my word, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

It is, on the other hand, the distinguishing character of all true disciples, that they affectionately and practically attend to the voice of Christ. Our Lord says, in the 10th chapter of St. John's Gospel, verse 27th, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;" and in the 3d and 4th verses of that chapter, speaking of himself as the shepherd, he says, "The sheep hear his voice, and he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice, and a stranger they will not follow;" but they follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth. Let us then, my friends, like Mary, whom he so highly commended, take our station at his feet, and thus choose, like her, the good part, which shall not be taken from us; and should we be tempted to withdraw from him, let us still cleave to him with purpose of heart, and repel every temptation to forsake this divine teacher, saying with Peter; "Lord, to whom shall we go," (if we forsake thee) "for thou," and thou only, "hast the words of eternal life."

Finally. How glorious will be the voice of Jesus at the last day, when the Lord Jesus being revealed from heaven, when all mankind shall be roused by his voice—the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God, when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth, attend his bar, and receive their doom. Then may it be our happiness to hear, from his own blessed lips, that delightful sentence, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. Amen.

SERMON LXXX.

CHRIST THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

Mat. ix. 12. But when he heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not the physician, but they that are sick.

THE Scriptures of truth uniformly represent Jesus Christ as the supreme object of every believer's love, as being "precious to every one that believeth,"—"the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." He is described as "the pearl of great price," to obtain which the spiritual merchant gladly parts with all that he is worth; and St. Paul goes so far as to say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." But, Is the Saviour thus highly esteemed by all who profess and call themselves Christians? Is the gospel of his grace, his righteousness, his salvation, supremely prized by all who are called by his name? Alas! it is far otherwise. Like Gallio of old, many "care for none of these things;" and others satisfy themselves with an occasional and careless attention to them. Like Pilate, they "find no fault in the man," but their hearts are engaged in the pursuits and enjoyments of the present world, and they "mind only earthly things." How shall we account for this? How is it that any, with the Scriptures in their hands, should thus forsake their own mercies, and lightly esteem the Rock of their salvation? The text resolves the difficulty. Here we find an answer—"The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."—It is

obvious to all, that a man in perfect health, who feels no pain, and is conscious of no disease, will not employ a physician. Whatever reports he may have heard respecting him, or whatever opinion he may entertain of his skill, he sees no present occasion for his assistance: and this was the condition of the Pharisees while our Lord was upon earth. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost;" and in the pursuit of this benevolent object, he disdained not freely to converse with publicans and sinners: not that he meant to countenance their sins; no; he mingled with them only to reclaim them, just as physicians go among the diseased merely to effect their cure. But this gave great offence to the proud Pharisees—men "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." They complained of his conduct to his disciples, saying, "Your master keeps company, and eats and drinks with publicans and sinners;" but "Wisdom is justified of her children." Our Lord, in the text, vindicates his own conduct, while he accounts for that of the Pharisees: "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."—These men were insensible of the state of their own souls, while others were rejoicing that they had found a remedy.

These words may teach us the four following things:

First—That sin is the disease of the soul.

Secondly—Jesus is the great physician.

Thirdly—Those who are insensible of their sins neglect him.

Fourthly—Those who know their true condition are very desirous of his help.

In the first place, we are taught that sin is the disease of the soul. We brought it into the world with us, deriving it from our first parents; for "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." It is with strict propriety that sin

is thus described, for it has just the same effects upon the soul that disease has upon the body.—Sickness destroys all our powers of action, and deprives us of ability to transact our affairs, however important and urgent they may be: whatever dangers we might avoid, whatever advantages we might obtain, there is a total inability for action; and thus it is with the soul. We have before us a vast eternity, and this is the only season for preparation; it is the seed time of eternity; we are now called upon to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;" but while this sickness prevails, we have no heart to engage in this great work; we cannot bear the thought of necessary exertion. Even the ordinary means of grace are frequently neglected; the Bible and prayer, and Sabbaths and sermons, are shunned; for the sinner has no heart to them.

Sickness deprives a man of rest; he cannot be composed: he feels a constant uneasiness, an insatiable thirst: and thus, as the Scripture saith, "There is no peace to the wicked;" he turns from creature to creature, seeking rest and finding none; the world disappoints him; he meets with repeated and perpetual difficulties; this perhaps irritates his temper, and makes him a burden to himself and others; to get rid of his cares he flies to amusements and intemperance; but the disease, instead of being relieved, is aggravated, and he grows worse and worse.

Disease frequently occasions delirium. A sick man knows not where he is, or what he says; when he is at death's door he fancies himself perfectly well, and if not prevented, would be in danger of destroying himself. Thus a man in a state of sin is furiously bent on his own ruin; he will not be persuaded there is any danger in his case; and he is very angry with the servants of Christ who would convince him of his error. Solomon says, "The heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil;

madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead." How do such persons fondly imagine that their hearts are good, even while their ways are perverse and desperately wicked.

Sin deforms the body. "When God with rebukes correcteth man for his iniquity, he maketh his beauty to consume like a moth;"—"he changeth his countenance, and sendeth him away." The finest face may be soon disfigured, and the most lovely person become loathsome; but, in the sight of God, nothing is so beautiful as holiness, nothing so loathsome as sin.

Finally, disease is the forerunner of death.—Many diseases are mortal in their tendency, and if not seasonably checked, will bring the patient to the grave. Some diseases baffle the skill of the ablest physician —Sin, which is the disease of the soul, is certainly mortal, if Christ the great physician does not interpose: "Death" was the original threatening, to keep man from sin. God said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest" of the forbidden fruit "thou shalt surely die;" and die he did; his body became mortal; and though he had a long reprieve, he returned at length to the dust from whence he came. But he immediately suffered a moral death; he became "dead in trespasses and sins," and liable to the bitter pains of eternal death. And thus, "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation:" This is our state? we are, universally, dead in sin; we have bodies doomed to the grave, and souls exposed to the just anger of an offended God. This is indeed a miserable state; but it would be far more so if there were no remedy. "Is there then no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" Blessed be God we can, with confidence, say, There is a physician, and he no less a person than the Son of God; and this is what we propose,

In the second place, to notice—That Jesus

Christ is the great Physician. There is none upon earth equal to the cure of the souls of men, but the Son of God; he pitied us in our low estate; he saw us perishing in our sins and in our blood; and he left his throne of glory—visited this sinful globe—took our nature into union with his own; yea, he "himself took upon him our infirmities: he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."—When on earth he gave many gracious specimens of his power to heal the *souls* of men, by healing their bodies; and such was his power, that "all manner of diseases,"—"every sickness and every disease" among the people was healed; yea, such was the compassion of our blessed Lord, that of all the numerous crowds of sick and afflicted people who applied to him, not one of them was sent away without relief.

In the cure of our souls two things are necessary: we are guilty, and must be justified; we are polluted, and must be sanctified: he performs both these parts of our cure; which is intimated by the expression, that out of his side came water and blood. See the 1st Epistle of John, 5th chapter, and 6th verse, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." So that this may encourage us to apply to him, and say,

> "Be of sin the double cure—
> "Cleanse us from its guilt and power."

Seeing, then, there is such a great and able Physician, may we not ask, "Why is not the hurt of the daughter of my people healed?" This leads us,

In the third place, to observe that men are generally too insensible of their sins, to apply to Christ; "the whole need not a physician;" it is

the worst symptom of the disease of sin, that men are totally insensible of it, or think themselves so slightly diseased, that they are in no danger; and, at all events, that a future season will be time enough. Sin destroys all our faculties; it blinds the eyes of our understanding, and deadens the feelings of our hearts; the mind is so darkened, that it does not behold sin as it is, and dreadful mistakes prevail, respecting its true and dangerous nature. Let us endeavour to detect some of these.

Some of these fatal mistakes among men arise from ignorance of the holy law. If sin be "the transgression of the law," we ought to consider, what are the demands of that law; and we shall find it requires perfect obedience to the will of God, and that, flowing from perfect love to him; it requires also that we should love our neighbour, in all instances, as ourselves. Now, while men are ignorant of this holy law, they discover no disease; but when, as in the case of St. Paul, the commandment comes, with a powerful conviction of its spiritual nature, unsatisfied demands and fearful curse, then, like him, they are ready to die.

Another mistake respects the depravity of our natures. Of this most men are ignorant. "God made man upright, but he hath sought out many inventions." Man is now an apostate creature, and it may be said of him, in all his faculties, as was said of Israel, in all the branches of her civil and ecclesiastical estate, "the whole head is sick, the heart is faint."

Another dangerous mistake respects their opinion of their own goodness. How many persons fancy they have good hearts, good desires, good intentions; they mean, they say, no harm, they do none to any man, even while they are living in open rebellion against God, and in the total neglect both of his law and of his gospel. Thus it is that men deceive themselves; they are "whole" in their own esteem, and are angry with those who would

convince them of their danger, though with the friendly design of their obtaining a cure. Others will admit that all is not quite right; they cannot say they are in perfect health, but they see no occasion to be alarmed; they are not worse than others: besides, say they, God is very merciful, and he will not deal with his creatures severely; and if they should come short at last, the merits of Christ will make up the deficiency; besides, they design to reform and repent, at some future period. Now all this discovers a dreadful degree of ignorance; they are strangers to themselves, and to the nature of that gospel, which, take it in which view you please, always supposes that man is in a fallen, dangerous situation. And hence it has justly been called "the religion of a sinner;" hence too we find, that men have "followed after the law of righteousness, but they did not attain unto it:" the reason was, "they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the law." Rom. x.

Take a view of the gospel itself for a few moments, and you will see that the Gospel supposes the condition of man to be not that of one who is whole, but who is exceedingly diseased. Why is the love of God in giving his Son spoken of as amazing love, as transcending all manner of conception?—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son;" and for what end? That men "*might not perish*," as they must have done but for this marvellous provision of love, but "that they might have everlasting life."—Again, the love of *Jesus Christ* is spoken of as the most extraordinary thing in the world, and as absolutely necessary for the salvation of man—that one must die for the people—"the just for the unjust." Our case must have been remediless without him, and his death is represented as being the sole foundation of our hope; so that to depend upon any thing else is, in effect, to frustrate the grace, and to say that "Christ died in vain."—Again, Take a view of the offices of our dear

Redeemer, and what do they imply? Is he a prophet? Then we were ignorant creatures, and needed his instructions.—Is he a priest? Then we were guilty, and wanted his sacrifice.—Is he a king? Then we were feeble and weak, and unable to defend or rule ourselves. Look at all the operations of the Holy Spirit, and they speak the same language, and while they hold out to us the divine and only remedy, they imply strongly our wretched state. Now all those that are ignorant of this, neglect to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ; but some acquaintance with it is found in all those who resort to him for relief—such as, in our text, are described as "sick." This leads us,

In the fourth place, to observe, that Those who know their true condition will gladly apply to Jesus Christ as their physician. For the eyes of their understandings are enlightened; they see the law of God in its spiritual nature and extensive requirements; they perceive the fearful consequences of its violation, for "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Further, their heart is softened, the heart of stone is taken away, and God has given them a feeling heart of flesh; the conscience is quickened; convinced, it may be, at first, of some one particular and flagrant transgression; but they are led back in painful reflection on the whole of their past lives, recollecting long-forgotten sins, and tracing them to the sad source of all—Original Sin. Hence earnest desires and sincere prayers are offered for relief. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the anxious enquiry. "Behold he prayeth!" is the observation that every one makes upon the returning sinner; then, indeed, the soul applies in earnest to the gospel of the grace of Jesus, and the gospel displays his ability to heal; it shews us that Jesus is possessed of almighty power; it shews that he possesses the same power that created and supports the world. The

gospel also displays the loving heart of the compassionate Redeemer; it records also the wonderful cures he has already performed, and which are left upon record for this reason, that in all future ages great sinners may be encouraged to repent; then the soul looks up to him as the Israelites looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, when stung by the fiery serpents, and ready to die of their wounds; and whoever thus looks to him shall be immediately healed; persuaded, fully persuaded both of his power and his grace, the soul finds health restored, and peace afforded to his guilty conscience.

I have now represented the case of all my hearers. In one of these two classes each of you will be found. Is it in the first? Are you among the whole, who think they need not a physician? If so, you are under a great mistake, and a very dangerous mistake; which, if not rectified, will prove fatal. Your present views of yourselves are at direct variance with the whole of the Bible. If you look to the *law*, that condemns you, because you have broken it; if you look to the *gospel*, that condemns you too, because you disregard its remedy. Whither then will you look, if neither the law nor the gospel can afford you relief?

You will perhaps say, Can I be sick without knowing it? Yes, you certainly may. Many are so, even as to their bodies; some very dangerous disease may be making a fatal progress, before it is discovered; some sink into a lethargy, and feel nothing; others are delirious; and it is no uncommon thing for persons to be seriously diseased while they imagine that all is well, and that there is no danger. O, my friends, sin, as we have already shewn, miserably perverts the judgment, and hides from men their true condition. Sinners are frequently like many consumptive patients, who

fancy, to the very last, that they are getting better and better, when there is but a step between them and death. O, believe the divine testimony. The word of God is true, and shews you your true condition; and while it points out your danger, kindly directs you to the true remedy. The infatuation of many persons on this point is truly lamentable. If their bodies be disordered in the slightest degree, they are sensible of it, and perhaps greatly alarmed; but their minds are so blinded, their consciences are so stupified, and they are so deluded by the tempter, that they will not believe, nor bear to be told of, their sickness and danger. May God enlighten your minds, soften your hearts, and fix upon your consciences such a deep and lasting conviction of your malady, that you may in good earnest cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

But, doubtless, I speak to others who are convinced of their disease, and such are apt to be dejected, and tempted to despair. The deceiver says, There is no help for you in God; your case is peculiar; there never was one so bad, and it is in vain for you to look for recovery: But observe, Jesus is mighty—almighty to save. Mark the words! "Able to save to *the uttermost*"—to *the uttermost:* and surely your case is not beyond the uttermost. You may object that sin greatly "abounds:" True; but grace shall "much more abound;" and remember, that the Saviour is as willing as he is able to save. Recollect the cures he wrought upon earth. Numerous were the applications made to him, and, sometimes, rather unseasonably; but he never rejected them; he healed all who applied to him. May I not say, then, "Arise, for the Master calleth thee." You may say, He does not call me by name. Yes, he does: for is not your name *Sinner?* That is the name by which you are called; he calls you *as Sinners.* Christ declared that he came "to call, not the righteous, but *sinners*, to repentance"—that "he came to seek and to save that which was

lost." Now this is your condition. He knows it is, and he has made you feel it; you are therefore the very persons he came on purpose to heal. But, you are deeply dejected and broken hearted. This is your character; well, "he healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." Psalm cxlvii. 3. Yea, when he first opened his commission, and declared the design of his coming into the world, this was declared to be one of the offices he came to perform—"to bind up the broken hearted, and to heal their wounds." Why then should you despair? Can you doubt the virtue of the remedy? or the love of the physician? or the sincerity of his offers? Be no more faithless, but believing. Take the remedy; believe its efficacy, and give him glory.

Some of you have received a cure. Gratefully acknowledge it to the glory of his name. You are not like some, mentioned in this chapter, who were prohibited from telling any man of it. No, you are commanded to blaze it abroad, and let the fame of Jesus be every where known. "Call, then upon your soul, and all that is within you, to bless his holy name, who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who hath redeemed thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercy." Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, who have been thus graciously restored from the dreadful disease of sin. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." It is generally necessary for a person recovering from disease to be very cautious, for fear of a relapse. You live in a contagious world: you live in an hospital, where all are diseased. Shun the dangers which surround you, and avoid even the appearance of evil. Study to preserve your spiritual health. Let him whose cure has been effected remember this—"Watch and pray, lest thou enter into temptation."

Finally, let us look forward with joyful hope to that happy world where sin is not known, or known only by recollection; where no inhabitant shall say, "I am sick," but where every one may and will say, I was "sick, nigh unto death," but the Lord had mercy on me, and healed me; now to my glorious Healer, even to the Lamb in the midst of the throne, be glory and honour, world without end. Amen.

SERMON LXXXI.

FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY.

Numbers xiv. 24. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went, and his seed shall possess it.

IT was well said by the prophet Elijah, to the people of Israel, when they "halted between two opinions," "If the Lord be God, follow him; but, if Baal, then follow him;" and thus may we say to persons who are lukewarm and irresolute in matters of religion, If the religion of the gospel be true and divine, then profess and practise it with all your hearts; but, if you can prove it to be false, then abandon it altogether. We meet with many people, who are so far convinced of the necessity of being religious, that they pay some little, cold, occasional, external regard to it, while their hearts are evidently attached to sin and to the world; but there are few, we fear, comparatively very few indeed, who are like Caleb, one of the princes of Israel, whose high commendation we have in the text, that he followed the Lord fully; and great was the honour that God put upon him for so doing.

When the children of Israel had left Egypt a few months, and had advanced towards the borders of the promised land, they desired Moses to send spies into it, to enquire whether its inhabitants were few or many, strong or weak; whether they

dwelt in tents or in fortified cities, and whether the land was fertile or barren.—This motion arose entirely from their unbelief. God, who had brought them out of Egypt by a series of miracles, had repeatedly declared that the land flowed with milk and honey; and he had assured them, by solemn promises, that he would put them into possession of it: what need then was there for these enquiries? But God, to punish them for their unbelief, permitted the experiment to be made; and what was the result? Ten out of the twelve deputed surveyors, returned and reported that the land was indeed admirably good, and they produced fine specimens of its excellent fruits; but, said they, the people are very numerous, strong, and warlike; they dwell in highly walled and well fortified cities; and many of the soldiers are so gigantic in stature, that we seemed in their sight but mere grasshoppers. This evil report augmented their previous fears; and, forgetting the power and the promise of God, they mutinied, and determined to appoint a captain, in opposition to Moses, and go back again to Egypt and to slavery. Caleb and Joshua, who were faithful to God, in vain attempted to appease the people, by assuring them that warlike as the nations were, God, the only defence of nations, had forsaken them,—that Jehovah was with Israel, and that they should assuredly prevail. God, who is more displeased with unbelief than with any other crime, then declared in his wrath, that these rebels should never behold the country they had despised—that their carcases should perish in the wilderness—but, that their children, headed by Joshua and his faithful friend, should joyfully possess the promised land. "My servant Caleb," says the text, "because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, will I bring into the land whereinto he went, and his seed shall possess it."

Doubtless these things are written for our admonition. The fate of the rebellious Israelites, loudly bids us "fear, lest a promise being left us of enter-

ing into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;" while it also powerfully invites us to imitate the example of the pious Caleb, that we too may receive the divine approbation.

The words of the text afford us the three following observations.

First. Real Christians are actuated by a spirit different from that of the world.—"Caleb had *another* spirit with him."

Secondly. Those who possess a right spirit, will follow the Lord fully:—and

Thirdly, That those who follow the Lord fully shall be honourably distinguished by him.

First. We observe that real Christians are actuated by a different spirit from that of the world.—The apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, 2d chapter and 12th verse, distinguishes between the two different spirits by which men are actuated; he says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."—Let us, in a few particulars, contrast these opposite spirits.—The spirit of the world is a spirit of darkness and error; for we are assured, in the passage just referred to, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," even when they are proposed to him; and though they are a display of the infinite wisdom of God, they seem to him "foolishness;" and while he is under the influence of the spirit of the world, "he cannot know them," for, to know them aright we must have "the Spirit of God:" by his aid alone they are "spiritually discerned;" and all believers have the Spirit of of God, who is also "the Spirit of Truth;" and by his teaching they "know the things which are freely given to us of God." The spirit of the world is a spirit of enmity

against God. "The carnal mind," of which the apostle speaks—unchanged by the Spirit of God, is "enmity against God;" and this enmity against God is manifested both by disobedience to the divine law, and contempt of the divine Gospel; so that they who are yet "in the flesh, cannot please God," and "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" but, if the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of love, dwell in us, then are we brought into a state of reconciliation and friendship with God, and are enabled to walk with him in love.—Again, the spirit of the world is a spirit of pride. Pride is natural to man—to every man; so that every mortal, however mean, guilty, and condemned by the broken law of God, fondly conceives that he has some excellencies that raise him above others, and can venture to boast of his good heart and of his good works: but, how contrary is this to the humbling gospel of Jesus! Our Lord himself says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God"—"when the commandment comes"—when the law comes to the conscience with light and power, as once it did to the heart of Saul the Pharisee, then pride receives a deadly blow; the rebel falls at the feet of Christ, and cries "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do;" he receives the broken heart and the contrite spirit, which in the sight of God are of great price. Once more, the spirit of the world is an indolent spirit, that is, in matters of religion, however diligent a man may be in the affairs of the world, yet how irksome to him is prayer, and other religious duties! how dull and tedious the Sabbath day! what a neglected book is the Bible! But, when we have the Spirit of God, we possess an active spirit, compared in scripture to "a well of water—springing up to everlasting life," and rendering the exercises of pure religion natural and pleasant to us. Again, the spirit of the world is an earthly spirit—so our Lord testifies that, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh"—it is nothing more—nothing better.

While men remain in a state of nature, they "love the world and the things of the world;" they seek and delight only in carnal objects; but if we have the Spirit of God, we "seek the things that are above," and give an habitual preference to them; weighing them in the balances of the sanctuary, where all things else, compared with them, must be found wanting.—The spirit of the world is a dastardly spirit.—The spies were terrified with the gigantic stature of the Amalekites, but they forgot the Almighty God, who had delivered them out of Egypt, carried them through the Red Sea, sustained them by miracle in the wilderness, and promised to deliver them from all their enemies. Thus natural men are wonderfully afraid of the difficulties of Religion; they are extremely afraid of meeting the scornful smile of the world, for "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer," at least that species of persecution; but, on the other hand, if we have the Spirit of God, we shall not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ—of the cause of Christ—of the name of Christ; but we shall determine, with courageous Paul, to glory, and to glory in nothing else but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, the spirit of the world is a spirit of unbelief—this was the great crime of the people spoken of in this chapter; and the Lord complains, in the 11th verse, "How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewn among them?" And alas! how slowly do men give credit to the God of truth!—How disposed are they to cavil at every peculiar and distinguishing doctrine of grace, and to catch hold of every difficulty and objection that can be started; while, perhaps, they themselves are slaves of their credulity as to the things of this world, and can receive even the grossest absurdities; but the real Christian is actuated by "the Spirit of truth;" he is "led into all truth," and the Spirit of God in him is "a Spirit of faith;"

he hears the word, mixes faith with it, and is profited by it. But,

In the second place, Those who possess a right spirit will follow the Lord fully.—" My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath *followed me fully*."

To " follow the Lord," is a scriptural phrase, in allusion to the affairs of men, and is used to include the whole of true religion.—Thus, you know, soldiers follow their leader, children follow their parents, disciples follow their teacher; and following the Lord *fully*, is to be distinguished from following him *partially*, as many do—some profess to approve of serious religion, and perhaps, " do many things gladly ;" yet they make some reserves ; there are some omissions which they allow ; some indulgencies which they retain ; and they are far from being universal, or uniform, or consistent in their religious services. Such persons resemble the people we read of in the 2d book of Kings, the 17th chapter,—the Babylonians who were sent to reside in Samaria ;—" they feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations who carried them away from thence"—" they feared the Lord"—they thought he was the God of that country, and that they ought to shew some respect to him, but at the same time, they retained a superior regard to their own false deities, whom they had served in Babylon. Natural men resemble these very much in their religion ; they pretend to fear and serve God, but at the same time are devoted to the service of idols; but this is a temper peculiarly displeasing to him. His language is, " My son, give me thine heart ;" nor will he be content with only a part of that—he must have the whole heart. Hear how he resented this partial kind of spirit, in the primitive church of Laodicea, " I would that thou wert either cold or hot ; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor

hot, I will utterly reject thee." There are many who, at least occasionally, attend the preaching of the Gospel; they admire and commend it; and it is to them, as to some of old, "a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument;" but it is added, "they hear thy words, but they do them not." They are pleased at church, and equally pleased at the theatre and ball-room. The well-sung hymn delights them much; but they are equally delighted with the song of vanity. They are grave, and can perhaps weep under a pathetic sermon, and they can weep with equal devotion at a tragedy. They associate with the pious, and join with them in their public services; but their dress, their manners, their chosen companions—all proclaim that they are still "of the world;" such persons, assuredly, do not follow the Lord fully.

What is it then fully to follow him? I would express the whole, briefly, in a few particulars. It is, I conceive to give full credit to the divine testimony—To pay a practical regard to all the ordinances of divine worship—To aim at the most perfect obedience to the command of God—To seek the fullest enjoyment of communion with him; and, To be zealous in promoting his cause in the world.

In the first place, it is to give full credit to the *whole* (not to a *part* only) of the divine testimony: And does not this testimony deserve and demand it? God is "a God of truth;" he cannot lie; he cannot deceive, or be deceived; but not to believe what he speaks, is "to make him a liar." It is a horrid crime, surely, to disbelieve the testimony of the God of truth; and *finally* to do so, is certain and everlasting ruin. Our first mother disbelieved the divine testimony, while she gave credit to the father of lies, and thus she fell. Thus also Israel fell in the wilderness; and thus their posterity, many ages afterwards, filled up the measure of their iniquities. The Gospel is of a simple nature; it demands "the obedience of faith," for "this is his commandment,

That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John iii. 23), and it is further written, that "he who believeth hath eternal life, and he that believeth not is already condemned." The Doctrines are divinely true, and are to be implicitly received; the Promises are to be considered as faithful, because he is faithful who hath made them; and we should imitate Abraham, whose faith is peculiarly celebrated, because he consulted not with flesh and blood—he calculated not upon probabilities, but fully believed that what God had promised he was able to perform; and if we are Christians indeed, we thus receive the divine word; we "hear the voice of the Son of God," and as the Sheep of Christ, follow our divine Shepherd, whithersoever he goeth.

Again, to follow the Lord fully includes a regard to all the Ordinances of divine appointment. This is the commendation of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that they "walked in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless"—among these prayer has an eminent place. "Praying always," says the apostle, "with all prayer"—private prayer, domestic prayer, social prayer, public prayer. Indeed they who pray most, follow the Lord the most fully. Hearing the word is also our bounden duty, and our delightful privilege; it is a principal ordinance of God, both for the conversion of sinners, and the building up of believers. Such likewise is the daily study of the holy Scriptures.—If we follow the Lord fully, "the word of Christ will dwell in us richly," and we shall meditate therein day and night. Give me leave also to say—that Attendance on the table of the Lord belongs to the duty of following the Lord fully. Many humble Christians, it may be, through a groundless timidity, too long neglect this holy ordinance; but it is both their fault and their misfortune; for doubtless they are great sufferers thereby. Now, to follow the Lord *fully* in all these things, is to engage in them with regard to the divine authority—with

seriousness and sincerity, as in the presence of God, and not occasionally, merely as humour and convenience may dictate; but resolutely and constantly, that so we may, as it were, "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life."

Further, following the Lord fully, includes obedience to the divine commands.—Believers are not, by the Gospel, released from their natural obligations to obedience; nothing can alter the right of God to command, nor the obligation of man to obey; and therefore no wilful omission is to be pleaded for: no actual sin to be indulged: self must be denied: the flesh crucified; the world opposed; nor are we to sit down contented with the lowest degrees of sanctification, but rather to aim at the highest.

Likewise, with regard to that fellowship and communion with God which is the high privilege of the saints, we are to "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and to say with the Psalmist, "My soul followeth hard after God; and after all, we must confess, with the Apostle, "We have not yet attained, nor are we yet perfect, but we press forward, towards the mark, for the high prize of our calling in Christ Jesus."

I only add to this, Zeal in promoting the cause of Christ in the world—He has a cause; his kingdom is to increase; and this is to be effected by instruments; *we* are his instruments, and the present is a special and favourable time for exertion; there are more facilities now, and in this country, than ever were known before; and therefore they who would follow the Lord fully, must set their shoulders to the work, and do every thing in their power to promote the cause and kingdom of God in this wicked world.

I proceed to the last thing, which is, That those who follow the Lord fully shall be honourably distinguished.

How remarkably favoured was the upright and courageous Caleb! The promise in the text, made to him, was very remarkable; "Him will I bring

into the land whereinto he went, and his seed shall possess it:" and though the fulfilment of the promise was delayed for forty-five years, yet the Lord preserved him in remarkable health and strength, so that at the age of eighty-five, he declared his health was as firm as it was when he was forty, when he went forth as a spy into the land: and if you turn to the 14th chapter of the Book of Joshua, you will there find that Caleb came forward to Joshua, the leader of the people, claiming the possession of the inheritance, "Behold, says he, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years; even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, and now, lo I am this day fourscore and five years old, as yet I am as strong as I was in the day when Moses sent me." O what a distinction was this, when among all the people who came out of Egypt, who were then twenty years old, two only reached the place, and were put in possession of the promise, all the rest (more than 600,000) fell in the wilderness, through unbelief.

As God distinguished Caleb, so will he distinguish all those who follow him fully. It is said of Enoch, before his translation, that he had this testimony, that he pleased God: and it ought to be the ambition of every Christian thus to please God by following him fully as Enoch did. Such persons also frequently receive the approbation of men, of all *good men* certainly, for they must heartily approve of following God fully; but even bad men will often commend. Courage and consistency will gain the approbation of the world, and a wicked man had been known to say, "If I could believe as such a one does, I should act like him; nay, I should surpass him."—There is another advantage, and that is, The approbation of conscience. Happy they who can say with St. Paul, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our

conversation in the world." Another advantage is, that many temptations are avoided. Peter followed his master "afar off," and miserably fell;—John followed him closely, and he stood his ground. They are in the greatest danger of falling by temptation, who keep at the greatest distance from God. But, after all—the great thing is,—Eternal glory will crown the whole; even as Caleb was put into possession of that rest, which, from the power and faithfulness of God he expected to enjoy. Not that the glory of heaven can in any way be considered as our desert, or the wages of our fidelity.—No; he that follows the Lord most fully, will be the most ready to say, "I have been an unprofitable servant;" yet the gracious recompense to which faith looks forward, shall unquestionably be bestowed. The promise is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." No man more than Paul ever magnified the grace of God; and yet, looking forward to death, he says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them who love his appearing."—As Caleb entered the promised land, so shall the believer enter the heavenly Canaan, for not one word which a faithful God has spoken shall fall to the ground.

From what has been said we may learn, First, that the true character of every man is fully known to God; it is recorded in the book of his remembrance, and it shall be published before an assembled world. It will then appear whether we followed *God* at all; whether we followed him partially; or whether we followed him fully.

Perhaps some who now hear me, follow not the Lord at all—they are indeed *following*—but it is "the multitude to do evil"—it is "the devices and desires of their own hearts:" but what said the

Lord Jesus when he was upon earth? "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." If we follow not the Lord, yea, if we follow him not *fully*, we have no part nor lot in the matter; and if we follow him not, whither are we going? there is but one other way, and that is the *broad way* that leads to death and destruction.—O sinner, stop! stop! in this thy way—for there may be but a step between thee and death.—O turn again, and God will have mercy upon you.

Others, perhaps, follow the Lord only in the partial manner that has been described. O how dishonourable this is to God! Is his service then of such a nature that he deserves not thy whole heart? Consider what a loser you must be by this partial sort of conduct. How dubious must it leave your state! Is not the state of your minds such that you cannot certainly say whether you are following the Lord or not? How uncomfortable is this condition!—many persons have religion enough to make them miserable, but not enough to make them happy.—O be persuaded no longer to act this part, but, from this moment, resolve, in the strength of divine grace, to give up your whole selves unto him—body, soul, and spirit, which is your *reasonable* service.

Finally—Let believers in Christ be animated and encouraged by the example of Caleb. When he got possession of the charming hill of Hebron, how delightfully would he review the way in which he had been led through the wilderness! Did he repent of his courage and perseverance? No; he would reflect with thankfulness on the power, goodness, and faithfulness of God? rejoicing not so much in his pleasant inheritance, as in the divine approbation. Let us then follow his example, and cheerfully obey the apostolic exhortation.—"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

SERMON LXXXII.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

Matthew xiii. 45, 46. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

THE true nature of the christian religion may be easily learned from the parables of Christ. It was well known that whenever the Messiah should make his appearance, he would set up a new kingdom in the world; but the nature of that kingdom was miserably mistaken by the Jews; to remedy whose mistake our Lord gives us many parables, especially in this chapter, which plainly describe its true nature, as a *spiritual* kingdom; not one that should "come with observation," or, outward shew and splendour, like the kingdoms of this world, but which should be of an internal kind, and consist in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

This parable, as well as that which precedes it, seems intended to point out the excellency of Christ and his great salvation, in the esteem of all true Christians. In the former parable, he is compared to treasure hid in a field, which a man having discovered, parts with all his possessions in order to purchase the field, and so make the hidden treasure his own. In this parable, our Saviour is compared to a pearl, extremely valuable and precious, which a

merchant, who was in quest of fine pearls, having met with, sells all his property in order to purchase it.

We may express the principal design of these words in the following observation.

Those persons who know the value of Christ, will prize an interest in him above all things.

The person represented in this parable as having found a pearl of great value, was in quest of precious jewels—a merchant—a dealer in jewels—accustomed to travel from one country to another, in search of such valuable articles, in order to obtain wealth by their purchase and sale. This fitly represents the man (indeed every man) who is searching for happiness, good, or pleasure; whose language is "Who will shew me any good?" The pursuits of men are various; but their principal object is the same; it is certainly happiness—happiness under some form or other; whether in the pleasures of sense, or the gratification of the mind. It is in the low and mean enjoyment of sensual pleasure that the bulk of mankind seek delight—to eat, to drink, to sleep; to be easy, gay, and merry, is all that the multitude seek. Others, more refined, direct their attention to arts or arms; they long to shine in courts or camps; to get a great name, and make a great figure in the world, and to obtain titles, and wealth, and distinction. These are the pearls which worldly men are seeking with great assiduity to possess, which few are able to obtain, and which if obtained are far from making the possessor happy. May I not say that Solomon was a merchant of this description—that he sailed round the world to obtain this jewel—happiness, and returned after a tedious voyage with his vessel empty? Hear his own confession as recorded in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He tells us what he had tried; he had tried mirth, and costly entertainments, and gay amusements, and after all

Vanity was the total sum; yea, such was his vexation too, in consequence of repeated disappointments, that he says, "I hated life." Vexation at his failure made life a burden to him. Some worldly men are honest enough to make the same confession, and many of them do so when on a dying bed, and in the prospect of a vast eternity; and such must all men make when they come to die, who have not been happy enough to find this pearl of great price.

But we may consider, not only the man who is in pursuit of worldly good as the merchant, but those persons also who are *religiously disposed*, who wish to be virtuous and good; but who as yet know not the Lord, and have never discovered from the gospel his inestimable worth. Man has been called, by some philosophers, "A religious animal;" and indeed it is wonderful to observe that in almost all countries, some sense of religion prevails, some adoration is paid to a Deity, there is a dread of his anger, and a desire of his favour. A consciousness of guilt, and an apprehension of death, judgment, and eternity, strengthened by the customs of their forefathers, the laws of their country, and the example of the multitude, induce those who are not atheistical or brutish to perform some religious ceremonies, in hope of the divine favour, and frequently to obtain the applause of their fellow men.

But it is truly pitiable to think how many, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about," as St. Paul said to the Jews, "to establish their own righteousness, not submitting to the righteousness of God," as revealed in the gospel. Many will repeat a prodigious number of prayers; keep many fasts; submit to irksome penances; shut themselves up for life in monasteries and nunneries; and others will go tedious pilgrimages for hundreds of miles; yea, some will undergo bodily torments, and death itself, to secure eternal happiness. And this is the language of the person introduced by the prophet

Micah, (chapter vi. 6.) "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul!" Here is a person represented as bidding high indeed for eternal life, and willing to obtain it at the greatest expense,—but it is the language of one who as yet is ignorant of Christ. And how many persons, among ourselves, for want of better information, profess a cold and comfortless religion —a system of painful restraints, and drudgery in duties; having no settled peace nor joy, but serving God with the spirit of a slave. But if it please him to bring the enquirer, by the gospel, to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour, full of grace and truth; who, by his obedience and his sufferings, has brought in an everlasting righteousness, by which every believer is fully and for ever justified,—and if brought to see that all the blessings of his great salvation, are perfectly free, "without money and without price"—without any meritorious qualifications whatever—then is he, like the merchant in the text, who, in the course of his journies and enquiries, meets at last with a jewel of such extraordinary magnitude, beauty, and perfection, as infinitely to exceed all he had ever seen, or heard of before; and finding that it is possible to make it his own, and that, by making it his own, he will ensure an immense fortune, he is glad to obtain it by any means; most willingly he parts with all he has, well knowing it is worth more than all, and that by the loss of all, he shall become an unspeakable gainer.

By this striking similitude, our Lord here represents the true convert, the real Christian. He discovers, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, in the use of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is truly excellent—superlatively excellent; he feels a vehement

desire to be interested in him, and is ready, willingly, yea, most gladly, to part with every thing for his sake. You will clearly see how wisely he thinks and acts, if you will consider for a moment, wherein this superior excellency of Christ consists.

Consider his Personal dignity and glory. "Who is he, that we may believe in him?" his name is "*Immanuel*," "God with us." He is the Son of God; the only begotten of the Father; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person;"

> "All human beauties—all divine,
> In our Beloved meet and shine."

In him are combined all the glorious perfections of Deity, and all the unsullied excellencies of humanity. "Great," indeed, and without controversy, —"Great is this mystery of godliness—God was manifest in the flesh." And, beholding his glory, the believer may well exclaim, with Thomas, "My Lord! and my God!"

Behold him in the character of Mediator; one, the only one, qualified to interpose between parties so remote from each other, as the Holy Jehovah and guilty men. He is fully qualified, inclined, and authorized, to make up the breach. Yea, he has actually made reconciliation for iniquity, by the sacrifice of himself; for with his righteousness God is well pleased; and through him pardon and eternal life are freely proclaimed, and the chief of sinners are invited to receive them.

Consider, likewise, the gracious offices and characters which he sustains, and which render him precisely what we want to make us happy. We are ignorant; he is the great Instructor; "he teacheth to profit," and "none teacheth like him." We are guilty; his blood cleanseth us from all sin; and washed in that blessed fountain, we are "whiter than snow." We are rebellious creatures; he brings us back to God, makes us willing in the day

of his power, and we become his humble and faithful subjects, He is a prince to govern, and protect us from all our crafty and powerful enemies, who lie in wait to destroy. We need a Friend—Jesus is that friend—a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, whose compassion and fidelity render him the best friend we can possibly find. We want a Counsellor:—He is our advocate, and will be our guide in every difficulty,—for he has promised, that if we acknowledge him in all our ways, he will direct our paths. We are diseased, and ready to die.—He is the great Physician, who is ready and able to restore us to health. We are poor,—He "counsels us to buy gold of him," and then are we rich indeed, rich towards God, and rich for ever.

Jewels are prized by vain mortals as ornaments. Wearing them is a mark of distinction; for inferior people cannot obtain them; and thus the wearer excites notice and admiration in the gay circles of the great. This may be thought a pitiable weakness; when poor vain mortals value themselves on a profusion of sparkling stones—but he who possesses the pearl of great price is fine indeed; he that "puts on the Lord Jesus Christ" surpasses an angel in splendour; like the church, in the vision of St. John, he may be said to be "clothed with the sun;" and those become honourable—for "to them that believe he is precious," or, "an honour." Dignified indeed, beyond expression, is he who possesses this pearl of great price.

In the days of superstition, precious stones were worn as amulets, or charms, to protect the wearer from divers diseases and mischiefs. We know of no such virtue in earthly jewels; but we assert that Christ is the *true Amulet;* and if we "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," nothing shall by any means hurt us;

"We shall be safe;
For God displays
Superior power,
And guardian grace."

Now, if Jesus Christ possess all these excellencies, (and the one half has not been told you) and if the soul that obtains an interest in him will be thus benefited, it is no wonder that the wise merchant, discovering his inestimable worth, should be willing to sell all that he hath, for his sake.

He is found: and blessed is he who has found him. In the parable of "the treasure," which precedes our text, it is represented as "hid in a field;" not obvious to the eye of the careless and inattentive traveller: and pearls are generally procured from the bottom of the ocean; so that he who finds the one, must dig for it; and he who gets the other must dive for them. The blessings of salvation escape the notice of the careless and the carnal; but "he that seeks shall find."—Here, then, in the word of the gospel, is this mighty treasure to be found. It is the business of the minister of the gospel to display this treasure, to proclaim its value, and to invite his hearers instantly to seek it; but it is the office of the Holy Spirit alone, to lead the seeking soul to obtain the prize; it is his gracious business to glorify Christ, and this he does by "taking of the things of Christ, and shewing them to men."

When this discovery is once made, then holy and earnest desires will rise in the soul, or rather *this* desire—this one desire, swallowing up, as it were, all the rest; so that he, who once was used to say, "Who will shew me any good?" now cries, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me." He who once was used to say, "I see no form nor comeliness in him, wherefore I should desire him," now exclaims, "He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." He, who when formerly invited to the gospel feast, "desired to be excused," now "hungers and thirsts after righteousness." "Yea, doubtless," says the believer, with holy Paul, "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; and count them (all things) but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him."

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in thee I find.

But how is this pearl to be obtained? It is to be bought,—"he goes and sells all that he has, and buys it." We are not to strain the metaphor, as if it were to imply that, by any valuable consideration whatever, we can merit this inestimable treasure; the meaning is, that the Christian gives such a hearty and decided preference to Christ, above all worldly things whatever, as to be willing, if need be, to part with them all, should they stand in the way of obtaining his grace, his righteousness, and his salvation. And, indeed, to say the truth, there are some things which must be parted with. That good opinion, for instance, of ourselves, which we are too apt to entertain; that dependence we are prone to place upon a religious education, upon freedom from gross vices, upon our goodness, virtue, sincerity, charity—all must be parted with. Our own righteousness must be accounted as filthy rags, if we would wear the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Sinful indulgences, of whatever description they may be, must also be given up. This splendid jewel would look ill upon him, who is covered with the deformity of sinful practices; and however dear these indulgences may be, and though the parting with them may be painful, as the plucking out the right eye, or cutting off the right hand, it must be done. We must "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and those who are Christ's are willing so to do.

Reputation must not seldom be forfeited, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, his cause and his people. If we cleave to Christ as we ought, we must separate ourselves from the world; and if we do so we shall find by experience the truth of our Lord's saying, John xv. 18, 19. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me be-

fore it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."—Protected, as we happily are by the laws of our country, from the hand of violence on account of our religion; yet, there is no power upon earth that can screen us from the reproach of the cross. Men will "speak evil of us;" but let it be "*falsely*, and for Christ's sake."

And shall we not be willing to bear reproach for him who "made himself of no reputation" for us? Shall we not readily part with our reputation, and "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach? Fear it not; it should rather be esteemed a jewel that adorns us. The cross of Jesus is our best ornament; God forbid we should glory in any thing except in that cross.

In the times of persecution, not character only, but liberty, and life itself were forfeited. Our Lord most candidly told his disciples, upon what terms they must become such,—that they must be willing to part with father and mother, wife and children, houses and land, and to be hated and persecuted by all; and to take up their cross and follow him, or else they could not be his disciples. Nor did they think the purchase too dear. Did they refuse the terms? By no means. Like Moses of old, they "esteemed the reproach of Christ, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." The Apostles of our Lord, when evil entreated, "departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ;" and "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and a more enduring substance."

IMPROVEMENT.

To conclude—You have heard the character of the wise merchant, and do you not approve of it?

Did he not act judiciously? Is not gain the proper object of a tradesman? and who blames a man for making a good bargain?—Now, say, Is this *your* character? What is your chief object—the object of your warmest desires? and that for which you are ready to part with all? Is it the World? Alas! it is vain! Make it not your portion; it will deceive and disappoint you. Even now, it does not afford you satisfaction; but think, O think of the solemnities of a dying hour. Think of that awful period, when you shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.—I ask, What *then* will profit you? what but Christ? Then, every soul will be ready to say with the Martyr, "None but Christ, none but Christ." I demand, Why do you not say so *now?*—Why should not that *now* be the language of your hearts; not waiting till the horrors of death and the dread of judgment shall extort it? O let me entreat you now, even now, to turn away your eyes from beholding vanity, and such will all terrestrial objects prove. Behold this great and glorious object, Jesus, with his great and eternal salvation, is set before you. How are you disposed towards it? Perhaps this may be the last time that ever this gracious Saviour may be thus presented to you, or that you may be affectionately invited to regard and receive him. If you reject him now, perhaps he will be for ever rejected. How then will you decide? Do you esteem him or not? Methinks, angels pause to witness your answer, and report it in heaven. Be persuaded to take the advice of Jesus—especially you who are young—"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things, (needful for life and for godliness) shall be added unto you."

It may be that you *are* seeking; and perhaps, you may be seeking in sorrow: but, fear not, the Lord hath said, "He that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth," and the wise man, to whom I before referred, who not only knew the

vanity of the world, but also the excellency of true wisdom, says, "If thou criest after knowledge, and lifteth up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."—The Lord giveth wisdom, he has promised to give it to them that ask it, and that liberally. And are you really willing to part with any thing, to part with every thing, that stands in the way of your enjoyment of Christ? If you were suffered to retain only one thing in the world, what would that one thing be? I can readily answer for every true believer—It would be Christ. Let every thing else go, he would say, give me Christ, and that is enough.

But perhaps you are discouraged at the terms proposed. The text directs you to make a purchase; and when you contemplate the infinite value of the pearl in question, you say, I can offer nothing in the least degree valuable. I have nothing. I am nothing. I can do nothing. How can I presume to purchase the pearl of great price? You say truly. You have indeed, as was before observed, no valuable consideration to offer. But let not this discourage you. In another scripture, resembling this, wherein the blessings of the gospel are compared to food and drink of the richest quality, and sinners are invited to come and purchase them, the terms run thus—"And he that hath *no money;* come *ye;* yea, come, buy wine and milk, *without money, and without price.*" Isaiah lv. 1. which is as much as to say, You shall be welcome to these great benefits, though utterly unworthy of them. Accept them as God's free gifts, and be content to be for ever indebted to grace—only saying, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"

Finally—How rich and how happy is the believer in Jesus!—We congratulate our friends when they have made a prosperous voyage; or when, in the course of providence, an addition is made to their

wealth; but O how much rather is a child of God to be congratulated!—"I know thy poverty," said Jesus Christ to the Church of Smyrna, "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich;"—they were poor in this world, but they were rich in faith; rich towards God; and if thus rich *now*, how will the glorified believer be enriched; this jewel will retain its value and its lustre beyond the grave, and will enrich and adorn the soul for ever and ever; yea a brilliant crown of glory awaits every believer in Jesus. God grant that this may be our final happiness, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON LXXXIII.

SINNERS ARE SELF-DESTROYERS, BUT SALVATION IS OF GOD.

Hos. xiii. 9. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.

"WHATEVER was written aforetime was written for our learning." Those things, especially, which were written to the Jews, are full of instruction to us. The literal meaning of the words is this—"Israel," that is to say, the ten tribes, exclusive of Judah and Benjamin, were awfully prone to idolatry, and it proved their destruction. In the 16th verse of this chapter it is said, "Samaria shall become desolate, for she hath rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces." Notwithstanding which, God was pleased to promise that he would be "their help;" and in the words which follow our text he says, "I will be thy king."—God himself would graciously reside in the midst of them, to rule and to save them.

It may appear to us very strange, that a people so singularly favoured of God as Israel was, should be so prone to depart from him—that a people so signalized by mercies, who were brought forth out of Egypt, sustained in the wilderness, and introduced into the promised land, by a series of miracles, that they, of all people on the earth, should forsake the God of their mercies, and fall into abominable idolatries! But alas! in this they were but a picture of fallen nature in general; indeed we may say, a picture

of ourselves, who have received so much from God and yet made so ungenerous a return. The words of the text are directed to us; it may be said to every one of us—"Sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself;" but, for thy consolation hear this, "in me is thy help found." These words may be said to include both law and gospel; they describe the sad condition of man as a fallen sinner, and yet they open to him the door of hope.

From these words I shall shew,

First, That sin is a most destructive evil.

Secondly, That every sinner is a self-destroyer.

And Thirdly, That there is help and salvation in Jesus Christ, even for self-destroying sinners. "*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.*"

In the first place we shall shew that sin is a most destructive evil; and if men were convinced of this, the great point in religion would be gained: but men's persistence in sin; their false peace; and their neglect of the gospel, all prove they are *not* convinced of this; and we ourselves, in fact, seem to be but *half* convinced.

To prevent the impression of this awful truth—that sin is a destructive evil—Satan interposes with his first lie—"Ye shall not surely die," said he to our first mother, though God had said, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt *surely* die;" and in the same way, Satan has ever maintained his destructive system; it is by this means, chiefly, that he has "deceived the whole world." We are likewise cautioned against "the deceitfulness of sin;" and we are told that "the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." O when these three notorious deceivers meet together, woe be to man—a deceitful heart, deceitful sin, and a deceitful devil, aided by the general

opinion and practice of a deceitful world in every successive age! Transgressors think it very hard that their beloved pursuits should be deemed so dangerous and destructive; but we appeal to "the word and to the testimony." The same word which assures you that there is a God, that you have an immortal soul, that it is appointed for men to die and come to judgment, that there is a future resurrection, that there is a heaven and a hell; the same word assures you that sin is a most destructive evil. What was it but sin that destroyed the happiness of angels in heaven—transformed them into infernal demons, and rendered them miserable for ever? What was it that destroyed the happiness of our first parents in the garden of Paradise? Why did God drive them out? What destroyed the image of God in human nature? for man was made in the image of God; but what is he now? an awful mixture of the brute and the fiend. Now we find darkness instead of knowledge, depravity instead of holiness, guilt instead of righteousness.

Turn your eyes to the surface of the earth. What destroyed its original fertility, and made it productive of "thorns and of thistles?" The ground was "cursed for man's sake," because he was a sinner. What has destroyed the general tranquillity of man? It was sin that opened the door to millions of evils. The poor babe enters weeping into the world, while it risks the life of its mother! What legions of fierce and loathsome diseases assail us in every stage of life—in infancy, in youth, and in old age! Behold the youth carried headlong by his tumultuous passions into vice, extravagance, and destruction. See then the man in middle age, struggling with labour, poverty, care, vexation, and disappointment; and then behold age, bending under the weight of infirmities, and saying, "Thou art righteous O God, but 'thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth.'"

Sin is the grand disturber of the world. It is sin that disturbs the conscience, that disturbs families, churches, cities, and nations. None will deny that it has destroyed millions of millions of the human race, sweeping away, once in about every thirty years, all its numerous inhabitants, "for dust we are, and to dust we must all return." What vast multitudes die in their infancy! What multitudes are cut off by intemperance! How many have perished by bloody persecutions! and still more by direful wars! What myriads have been drowned in the seas, or consumed by lightning, or swallowed up, by hundreds and thousands at a time, by fearful earthquakes! and O that this, awful as it is, were the worst! but still further destruction awaits the impenitent, and without an interest in the great salvation of Christ, the *soul* as well as the body must be destroyed—not, indeed, by annihilation, which the wicked would earnestly desire, but by "a second death"—an eternal banishment from the presence of God. Fear him, then, who can not only "kill the body, but who is able to cast both body and soul into hell." Yes, sin is indeed destructive. "The wages of sin is death," and, as St. James saith, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth *death*." Hear also what the holy law of God denounces against every transgressor: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." This then is the state of the case, and is it not most true that sin is a destructive evil? O Israel, that thou hast *destroyed* thyself? and this will appear more plainly by shewing,

In the second place, that

Sinners are self-destroyers.—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed *thyself*."

What is more shocking than for persons, renouncing that natural self-love which rules all man-

kind, to prepare for their own destruction the fatal bowl, the knife or the pistol, or the halter, or to plunge into a watery grave. Here we pity, while we blame; and yet all wilful sinners are acting the same desperate part; they are destroying themselves, and yet they are not aware of it; and if they are at all apprehensive of their errors, they are apt to throw the blame on others, yea, even upon the blessed God himself. Against this presumption the Apostle James cautions us, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God—God tempteth no man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust." Sinners, although they are self-destroyers, always endeavour to throw off the blame from themselves upon others. Our first parent wished to transfer the blame from himself, and therefore said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." She also, as unwilling to bear the blame, said, "the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Thus also it is that sinners blame their passions, and charge their vices upon their constitutions, or upon their companions, or upon their situations in life, and sometimes upon Satan: but unless the tempter had found a proneness in us to sin, all his temptations would be fruitless, as they were when they were exercised upon the Lord of life and glory. Alas! all the sins we commit flow from our own polluted hearts. So our Lord says, in the 15th chapter of the Gospel by St. Matthew, "Those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and those are the things which defile the man." It will be found therefore, that the blame is all our own; that there is an obstinate persistence in sin against the remonstrances of conscience, and the admonitions of God. Thus, of old, he spake unto the house of Israel, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for *why will ye die*,

O house of Israel?" This expostulation plainly throws the guilt upon man, as his own destroyer; why *will ye die*, O house of Israel?—it arises from the wilful obstinacy and hardness of the human heart. The prophet also charges the Jews with a wilful resistance to the Gospel, "they shut their eyes that they might not see; they stopped their ears, that they might not hear;" and our blessed Lord says expressly to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life;" and in our Lord's admirable discourse with Nicodemus, as recorded in the 3d chapter of St. John, it is expressly said, "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," and "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

True penitents will readily confess this; they will take shame to themselves; and say with the Royal Penitent, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." Yes, real Christians, under their deepest afflictions, will adopt this language, "Shall a living man complain,—a man for the punishment of his sins?" And, depend upon it, whatever excuses men now make, the time will come when "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world be found (and confess themselves) guilty before God." "The books will be opened," and a clear impartial statement made, and the righteous judgment of God will be apparent to all; it will then appear that the way of sin was chosen; that it was preferred, and that wilful unbelief prevailed. Sinners know what frequently passes in their own minds concerning this; they put a force upon themselves, and stifle all convictions; resolving, whatever the consequences may be, that they will

proceed.—Sinners are self-destroyers—but we go on

In the third and last place to shew that

There is salvation in Jesus Christ, even for self-destroying sinners.

O what news, what good news, what unexpected news, do we find in this third part of our subject! "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,"—and what might be expected to follow?—You must take the consequences—it is the fruit of your own doings—but, instead of this God has been graciously pleased to say, "In me is thine help found." Thus, in another place, where we have a long and a black catalogue of the sins of Israel—where the heavens and the earth are called upon to witness their iniquity, yet it is followed up with this encouraging language—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

The help—the salvation which sinners stand in need of, can only come from God. "Shame and confusion of face belong unto us,"—but it is added, (O blessed addition!)—"To the Lord our God belongs mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him." The truth is, man neither wants this help, nor could procure it if he did. Man does not want it; he sees little or no need of pardon; he justifies his offences, in part, and is inattentive to that Gospel which proclaims redemption. And as to another great branch of it, the sanctification of our nature,—he not only does not desire it, but he dreads it; he has no sort of wish for it, and the name of a *Saint* is in his opinion, nearly the same as that of an hypocrite, or a fanatic.

But if men really desired it, how could they obtain it? Who could have devised that wonderful plan of redemption which is laid before us in the Gospel? Who could have made atonement for the sins of

the world? Who could have cleansed the foul hearts of men, and made them new? Who could have procured a good title to endless glory? As well might a sinner create a new sun, a new moon, or a new world, as bring about the least part of this great salvation. But God says, "In me is thy help found." Mercy, unsought as well as undeserved, first moved his gracious heart: "He remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever." Hence that marvellous, that unparalleled, that unspeakable gift,—God's own dear Son, incarnate in our nature. "Help was laid upon him," who came, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. In the 89th Psalm he says, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty, whom I have chosen from among the people." It pleased God to punish the sin of man in the person of his Son, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "He died, the just for the unjust;" he bore the curse to remove it from us; he was "made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,"—through him there is pardon for sins of the deepest dye. Yes, if any one sinner had as much guilt as usually falls to the lot of a thousand, there is pardon even for such an one, if he come to God through Jesus Christ. In order to encourage the chief of sinners, we find examples held forth, such as that of the Apostle Paul in the 1st Epistle to Timothy, i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief; howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

Yes; there is sufficient help, for every purpose of our salvation, not only for the pardon of the

greatest sinners, but grace that can conquer the most obdurate hearts, even those that are as hard as adamant. God will "take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh." Powerful lusts, though deeply fixed in our very nature, may be rooted up by the grace of Christ; even confirmed habits of sin may be destroyed. Although the "Ethiopian cannot change his skin, or the leopard his spots," yet those who have long been in the habit of doing evil, may learn to do well. God can raise up children to Abraham, out of the very stones; and the power which effects this is compared to that which effected the resurrection of the dead body of Christ from the grave.

The same grace is sufficient to preserve the soul in the midst of the strongest temptations. He is able to keep his people unhurt in the most dangerous circumstances, even as the three confessors remained unsinged in the burning fiery furnace; or as Jonah was kept alive for three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. We daily witness the miracles of divine grace, as marvellous as if a stone were suspended in the air, or a spark kept alive in the ocean. We are "kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

Thus we see that sin is a most destructive evil—that every sinner is a self-destroyer,—and that there is help and salvation in Christ even for the self-destroying sinner.

IMPROVEMENT.

From the whole, let us learn, First, to think rightly of sin. Here is the soul-ruining mistake of men. They are not told, or will not believe, that sin is of a destructive nature. Beware of slight thoughts of sin. Sin is no trifle. They are "fools only who make a mock at sin." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "Let no man deceive you with vain

words ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Listen not, my friends—you especially who are young, listen not to your deluded companions, who would persuade you that there is no danger. Thus Satan deceived our first mother, and ruined the world. Beware, lest it ruin you. I entreat you to believe God, and disbelieve the enemy ; yea, I may say, believe your ears ; believe your eyes ; believe your feelings ; surely you may believe when you see around you so many horrid effects of sin, and hear, as it were, the groans of the damned, all uniting to say—Depend upon it, sin is a destructive evil. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, (Luke xvi. 19, &c.) the former, who, after a worldly life of self-indulgence, is represented as lifting up his eyes in torments, and in vain requesting the momentary relief of a drop of water to cool his tongue, requests that a messenger may be sent to his father's house, to testify to his surviving brethren, lest they also come into the same place of torment. What was the testimony he wished to be made to them ? Was it not this—that sin indulged, destroys the soul ?—that sinners are, as he had been, self-destroyers! But in vain did he request that such a message might be sent. It was needless. The same testimony had been made by Moses and the prophets, whom he and they refused to hear. The same testimony is now made to you. O hear it, receive it, and act accordingly.

But there is another, a superadded evil ; something, if possible, more destructive than sin itself—I mean unbelief—a rejection of the gospel, which will prove more fatal than all other sins: for, as we have already said from God's word, " This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light." How then " shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ?" That is a question which is not answered ; it is a question that cannot be answered ; it is a question

that is not intended to be answered; "How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

How earnestly, then, should every sinner cry to the Lord for help. He says, "In *me* is thy help;" In me. In me *only*. I am the God of salvation. In vain shall it be looked for any where else. But in me you may find it. In me, who has justly offended, but am now reconciled through the blood of my Son. I was angry, but my anger is turned away. Now I wait to be gracious. Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find: knock, and the door of mercy shall fly open. Then shall you say and sing. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also hath become my salvation."

So ready is the Lord to bestow this blessing, that he would have the good news of it published to every creature; he is so ready to bestow it, even upon the worst of sinners, that when he ordered his apostles to go into all the world, he bid them begin at Jerusalem; that those persons who had embrued their hands in his blood, should be the first to receive the advantage of the shedding of that blood for the pardon of their sins. It has been said that "*Now* is the accepted time," but you cannot be sure that it will ever be said so again; you cannot be sure that you shall ever have an opportunity after the present, of hearing this good news. I entreat you then to hear his voice while it is called to-day. Retire to your closets this very evening, you who have neglected it before; pour out your hearts before God, and seek an interest in this great salvation.

Finally, We learn from what has been said, that grace must have the whole glory of our salvation. We can destroy ourselves, but we cannot save ourselves; God says, "In *me* is thy help found." Salvation is invented, procured, bestowed, and applied by God himself; and every believer will gladly ascribe the praise to him. The language of his heart will be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,

but to thy name be all the glory." Grace first contrived the plan; grace begins the work; grace carries on the work; grace will crown the work; and when the top-stone shall be laid, it will be with shoutings, crying Grace! Grace! unto it. Amen.

LORD, we confess our numerous faults,
How great our guilt has been!
Foolish and vain were all our thoughts,
And all our lives were sin.

But O, my soul, for ever praise,
For ever love his name,
Who turns thy feet from dangerous ways
Of folly, sin, and shame.

'Tis not by works of righteousness
Which our own hands have done;
But we are sav'd by sovereign grace
Abounding thro' his Son.

'Tis from the mercy of our God
That all our hopes begin;
'Tis by the water and the blood
Our souls are wash'd from sin.

'Tis thro' the purchase of his death,
Who hung upon the tree,
The Spirit is sent down to breathe
On such dry bones as we.

Rais'd from the dead we live anew;
And justify'd by grace
We shall appear in glory too,
And see our Father's face.

SERMON LXXXIV.

ONESIMUS; OR, THE PROFITABLE SERVANT.

[Adapted particularly to servants.]

Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, ver. 10, 11. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds; which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now, profitable to thee and to me.

THIS is a short epistle, written by the apostle Paul, to his christian friend Philemon, who resided at Colosse; it was written in behalf of Onesimus, who had been a slave, belonging to Philemon. It appears that Onesimus had robbed his master, and then ran away from him to escape justice; he rambled to Rome, where the apostle Paul was then a prisoner, and by some means or other, he went to hear him preach, probably in his own hired house: here he was converted to God, and became a new man; the apostle became acquainted with him, and Onesimus was much attached to him. The apostle felt himself interested in his welfare; he found him very useful to him as a servant; but as he belonged to another, he would not retain him without his consent, but sent him back to his master whom he had wronged; and, in order to secure a favourable reception, sent with him this letter, which competent judges consider as a perfect example of good letter-writing; as containing the most lively sentiments both of humanity and generosity; and discovering inimitable dexterity

and address, insomuch that it is preferred to a letter of a similar kind, written by the learned Pliny, who was so famous for epistolary writing. A letter from such a man as the holy and venerable apostle Paul, whose heart was so full of christian piety, may be expected, though written on a temporal affair, to contain evangelical sentiments of the most useful kind; and accordingly we find in it much matter of the most edifying nature. We shall, in the consideration of it, attend to two things.

The character of Onesimus before his conversion; and

The great change that was wrought in him by the grace of God, with the evidences thereof.

Let us first consider the character of Onesimus before his conversion.

It appears from this epistle that he was a slave—a servant of the lowest description, one who was bought with money, and entirely at the disposal of his master. This was allowed by the law of Moses; and we here see a good man having a servant of this description in his house. No doubt he was treated, not with rigour and severity, but with christian kindness and compassion; nevertheless slavery seems to be incompatible with the genius of the gospel of Christ; and does not accord with that excellent rule, commonly called "The golden rule"—"Whatever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even the same to them." Being converted to God, the apostle requests Philemon to receive him again into his family and service.

But Onesimus had not only been a servant, but "an unprofitable servant; in times past unprofitable"—that is, a worthless and injurious fellow, alluding to his name Onesimus, which signifies *profitable:* but the apostle intimates how inconsistent his

character had been with his name; and, indeed, there is too often a sad disagreement between a person's name and character. How many are called by the honourable appellation of *Christians*, who are really a disgrace to their profession: which reminds us of what was once said by Alexander the Great, to a private soldier in his army, who was a worthless man and a coward: he ordered him either to change his name, or become a better soldier: and thus it might be said to many who are called Christians. It is doubtless the duty of servants to endeavour to render themselves *profitable* to their employers. This man, in his unconverted state, was unprofitable; but now he had become a profitable man. All servants should endeavour, by honesty, frugality, and diligence, to seek the welfare of the family in which they live; and surely this man was under double obligations to have done so, for he had a very good master; the apostle speaks very highly of him; he calls him, in the first verse, "Our dearly beloved and fellow-labourer;" he speaks in the second verse of his having "a church in his house"—that is, the little society of the faithful, who lived at Colosse, assembled for worship in his habitation; and probably the first Christian churches used to assemble in like manner in private houses. And in the sixth and seventh verses we find there were many good things in him to be acknowledged, and particularly "that the bowels of the saints were refreshed by him; so that he appears to have been a man of eminent piety; and was it not a great privilege for Onesimus to live in such a family as this? But alas! he had neglected and abused these privileges: and let it be observed that the faults of bad servants are *double faults* when they live in good families; it makes their guilt so much the greater; for how inconsistent is their vicious conduct with the order of a pious house, in which the scriptures are daily read, and prayers and praises offered up to God. O let servants in pious

families reflect upon the privileges they enjoy, and remember they must one day give an account to God how they have improved or abused them. Gladly attend, if you live in a pious house, gladly attend to the worship of God, and do not think it a hardship; do not indulge sleep, when the scriptures are read or prayer is presented to God. And let not servants think themselves excused from private prayer, because they join, at least in appearance, in family prayer; rather let it be the means of teaching them how to pray, and of stirring them up to pray in private for themselves.

Further, It appears that Onesimus was a *dishonest* servant; probably he had acted the part of the thief. The apostle says in the eighth verse, "if he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that to my account." There is little doubt, though it is thus mildly expressed, that he had been a dishonest man, and had fled from justice: but "if he oweth thee ought," says the apostle, "put it to my account" —"*impute* it to me" (which, by the way, gives us a just notion of the meaning of the phrase "imputed righteousness"—for it is the same word that is used in Rom. iv. 16. "As David also describeth both the blessedness of the man unto whom God *imputeth righteousness* without works," and in other verses to the same import.) Alas! how much dishonesty is committed in the common concerns of life; in the conduct of trade and business; in the behaviour of masters and servants! As to the latter, how few make conscience of wasting their master's property, neglecting his business, idling away their time, which is a real theft, though not usually punished by human laws, but which will not escape the righteous judgment of God. But Christian servants are charged to conduct themselves in a very different manner, and especially "not as *eye-servants*," who do nothing well but when they are watched; but performing every branch of their duty "as to the Lord, and not as unto men."

Further, This man was a fugitive, a run-away

servant; he deserts the business and house of his master, which was itself a robbery, for he was not at his own disposal, his person being the property of Philemon: but guilt generally excites fear. So our first parents, when they sinned against God, strove to hide themselves from his presence among the trees of the garden: but who can flee from God? "whither shall we go from his presence?" "There is no darkness, neither shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Besides, "God will bring every secret thing into judgment; whether it be good or whether it be bad." Then, if not before, will that scripture be verified, "Be sure your sin will find you out." Onesimus, in his rambles, comes to Rome, which was a very great city; and like great cities in general, the very sink of iniquity. Great offenders often flee to similar places, to hide themselves amidst the multitude in a populous city. Or, having lost character and employment, he might have gone thither for the purpose of committing further depredations. And here, we might have expected him to have become worse and worse; but, "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts!" God was pleased to over-rule his crime, and his coming thither, as the means of his being converted to God. And this is the second thing we are to consider.

Let us now attend to the great change that was wrought by the grace of God on the heart of Onesimus, and the evidences that were given of that change.

The apostle Paul was then a prisoner in Rome. Having appealed to Cæsar, from the Jews, he was brought, after very great perils and difficulties, to that immense city; and there, the Lord so interposed in his favour, that he continued two whole years, and was permitted to preach in his own hired house, to all those who chose to repair to it: and there, though he was prevented from going on

with his beloved work of spreading the gospel in new places, and travelling from one country to another for that purpose, yet he was permitted to write those admirable epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, to the Philippians and others; so that though there were some hundred sermons prevented by his imprisonment, yet there have been millions edified by his writings. There is not a sabbath-day passes—there is hardly a sermon that is preached throughout the Christian world—there is hardly a congregation convened at any time, that does not derive great advantage from the writings of that holy man of God. We have reason to admire the grace of God thus over-ruling the wickedness of men. Nor was he useless in that great city; he was not useless in preaching; there were Christians in Rome, to be sure, before Paul went there; but probably they were greatly revived, and multiplied too by his preaching; for he says, in the close of one of his epistles, "All the saints salute you, chiefly those that are of *Cæsar's household*."—Into the house of *Nero*, the cruel tyrant, the grace of God found its way, and had its due effect upon those who were living in the midst of wickedness. Onesimus came to hear him. What could induce such a man as Onesimus to go to Paul's house to hear him? Perhaps curiosity. Curiosity has brought many a man to hear the gospel; and though it be a poor unworthy motive, God has over-ruled it for good. So Zaccheus climbed the sycamore tree, for no better purpose than to see what sort of a person Jesus was; but the Lord, that very day, brought salvation to his house and to his heart. Thus it was with Onesimus. Perhaps some acquaintance might have invited him to go to hear—one who had met with profit under Paul's preaching; and it is very commendable for persons who have found benefit from the word, to invite their friends to come and hear it also. Many have been converted to God

by this means. It is not improbable that Onesimus might have heard the Apostle Paul preach at his master's house; he had perhaps heard his doctrine and witnessed his behaviour, he had probably listened to his conversation; and there is something so attractive in the truth, in holiness, and in zeal for God, that some persons, though wicked, cannot help feeling a reverence for it; yea, there is something in the preaching of the Gospel so much superior to any other preaching, that some who do not understand or believe it, feel an attachment to it, and hear it almost against their will. May it please God to visit such with its power! This is the case with many servants who have attended the Gospel because their masters or mistresses did so, and could scarcely forsake it afterwards, though they knew not why.

This man, however, was "born of God;" the Apostle says of him, ver. 10. "whom I have begotten in my bonds;" he also calls him his Son, "my son Onesimus,"—this mode of expression is common in scripture. It is said in James, i. 18, "God of his own will, begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures;" and the Apostle Paul says the same to the Corinthians, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the the Gospel." In all ages God has employed the preaching of his Gospel as the principal, though not the only means of the conversion of sinners; the preaching of the cross is "the power of God to salvation." The weapons of our warfare, says the Apostle, are not carnal, but they are mighty through God, to the pulling down of the strong holds of the devil." Now, this man renounces the hidden things of dishonesty, and he shews, by sufficient and satisfactory evidence, that he has become a new creature. Let us enquire a little into this evidence.

Paul, we see, had the fullest satisfaction in him; he speaks with the greatest certainty concerning him; and scruples not to recommend him in the

warmest manner. In the first place, as an evidence that he was really changed, we mention his confession of his former wickedness: for doubtless he did make confession of it; or how did the Apostle come to know it? He knew nothing of this man; he had never seen him in this great city; but grace always humbles the subject of it; it always leads him to an acknowledgment of sin. It is likely that this man had come forward and made himself known to the Apostle. Methinks I see him, with a bashful countenance, approaching this man of God, saying, "Perhaps, Sir, you do not know me; but I remember you when you was at Colosse, at my master's house. I had a good master, Sir, Onesimus, your friend; but I have been a bad servant. I have wronged him, and fled hither: but by the grace of God, through your preaching, I have been brought to repentance; and have come to break my mind to you, and to take your advice."—My brethren, it would be a great consolation to the ministers of the Gospel, if persons who have received benefit from their preaching, would make it known to them; it would render them more happy and more useful, if they knew in what manner their preaching had been blessed.

Another evidence of his conversion was his willingness to return to his master, for no doubt he was perfectly willing to do so, and Paul did not write to this effect without his consent; he was willing to go back, and humble himself before his master, whom he knew, being a good man, would be glad to receive him, if he had evidence of his being changed, which evidence he would have by this admirable letter of the Apostle Paul. No doubt, true penitence is always accompanied with a desire to make restitution. If a man has wronged another, true penitence will make him wish to undo the evil he has done, as much as possible: and in matters of dishonesty, I should think little of any man's religion, or pretended repentance, who did not find some means to make restitution. This

is doubtless the duty of every man, and if the party wronged is deceased, then to his family: or if that be not possible, then it should be made to God and the poor.

But the Apostle says he had been "unprofitable, but now he is profitable both to thee and to me." Pious servants will make themselves profitable; and let that pretended piety be deemed good for nothing, and mere hypocrisy, that does not lead servants to be good servants, in the family where they live,—honest, obliging, industrious; then they will be *profitable:* for a good servant is a great blessing to a family, and a bad servant is a real curse. Now also he had become profitable to the Apostle; perhaps his love to the servant of Christ, from whom he had derived so great a benefit, induced him to offer his service to this poor prisoner of the Lord, to do his errands, and serve him in every possible way; and Christians will esteem it their privilege to shew respect and affection to those ministers from whom they have derived spiritual advantage.

Further. Observe the Apostle's great regard for this man. He calls him his "*Son*,"—he calls him his "Brother beloved,"—he calls him his "Bowels." All these epithets are expressions of Christian love and kindness to a child of God. This shews us, likewise, that in spiritual concerns, God is no respecter of persons. "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, bond nor free,"—there were great distinctions of this sort under the Old Testament dispensation, but not now; Christ is "all and in all," nor was the humble condition or poverty of this man any reason for the Apostle's thinking the less of him, "Hearken, says St. James, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"—Oh how valuable is the acquisition of one immortal soul!—What is Onesimus? A slave!—a dishonest slave!—a runaway slave!—but no sooner is he a partaker of

the grace of God, than he is "a brother beloved;" yea, the Apostle speaks of him as "his own bowels,"—so tender is the regard he feels for this man. Hence the conversion of one soul, of whatever degree the person is—the conversion of one soul is an event of great importance, in the eye of faith, to the man who looks forward to an eternity of existence in heaven—the conversion of one soul is a matter of much greater importance than the revolution of a kingdom or an of an empire!

And see how the grace of God obliterates, and blots out former offences! Paul seems almost to have forgotten what the man *was*—he looks at what he *is*,—a brother beloved in Christ Jesus; and this is agreeable to the genius of the Gospel. "What think ye? says Christ, if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? and, is there not joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth? and if there be joy in *heaven*, shall there not also be joy on *earth?*"—God, of his infinite mercy, passes by and forgets all the offences of those who believe in his dear Son; it is a branch of the covenant of grace, "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" and as it is expressed in one of the Prophets, in Ezekiel, xviii. 21, "If the wicked turn from all the sins that he hath committed, and keep my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall not die; he shall surely live, all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned to him." And here also Paul gives us a striking example of brotherly love. Dearly as he loved Onesimus, now a converted man, and very useful to him, he will not retain him; he is the property of Philemon, and therefore he parts with him; and not only so, but he sends a letter, containing all the arguments that ingenuity could devise, in order to serve this man, and to secure for him a kind reception. He restores him to his mas-

ter, assured that by the grace of God he will become a truly valuable servant.

Now to conclude. Let us, in the first place, admire the wise providence of God, in over-ruling all human events, and sometimes even the sins and follies of men, for their everlasting advantage. God permitted this man Onesimus to do what he did; he permitted him to run away to Rome, and there the grace of God found him out—so Joseph was sold into Egypt; it was a vile transaction; but after many remarkable events, when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, and when they were troubled at his presence, Joseph said to them, "Come near to me, I pray you: and they came near him, and he said, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt! Now, therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life, to preserve your posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance; so now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God:' O what benefits did they ultimately derive from this act to their brother; and thus it often happens, in the mysterious proceedings of divine Providence, causing the wrath and even the guilt of man to praise him.

But again, Let us adore the riches of sovereign and almighty grace, as manifested in this man. Surely it must be admitted that here was a man "saved by *grace*." By what else could he be saved? and it might truly be said of him that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." O how remarkable is the event, when you reflect both on the preacher and the convert. Who was the preacher? Once a persecutor of the saints; and who was the convert? A converted thief!

See also the genuine effects of true grace! This man, who had been unprofitable, yea, more than unprofitable, this man, who had been extremely

injurious, becomes, not only a partaker of mercy for himself, but he becomes a useful man to others; he was useful to Paul, and no doubt he was useful afterwards to his old master Philemon; and perhaps many in the town would hear of it, and be induced to say, "What a marvellous change is wrought in this man! How did it come about? Some think that Onesimus himself afterwards became a minister of the Gospel. O what a blessed alteration grace makes, and if it produce a change in a man's heart, it will certainly produce a change in his conduct also.

Further, let pious persons from hence derive encouragement as to their ungodly relations and friends. It may be that while I have been speaking of Onesimus, your thoughts have been travelling to some spot or other, where your relations live, with regard to whom you have reason to entertain fear as to their eternal state. Think then of Onesimus, and offer up incessant prayer to God for them, for nothing is too hard for the Lord; none are beyond the reach of divine grace.

Finally—Let this subject recommend to all men the use of the means of grace. Let it recommend the hearing of the Gospel of Christ. How did all this change happen? It was doubtless by the special grace and power of the Spirit of God, but then it was through the instrumentality of the word. We should therefore be encouraged to bring all we can to hear the word of God; and let nothing be done to discourage the worst of men from coming to hear it, even such as shew that they hate and despise it: yet let them attend. Who can tell what God may effect by the teaching of his Holy Spirit? What is the language of wisdom? "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Yet, let none presume upon future times and opportunities, these we cannot command; but this we know that "now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation."

SERMON LXXXV.

SUPERABOUNDING GRACE.

Romans, v. 20. (latter part). Where sin abounded, Grace did much more abound.

SIN and GRACE are two of the most comprehensive words in our language. Hell and heaven are connected with these two things, as Cause and Effect. Sin leads only to hell, and grace alone can lead to heaven:—surely, then, it becomes us to be well acquainted with the nature of sin, which is the spring of all misery, and with grace, which is the fountain of eternal life. Much is said of both these in a masterly manner, by the Apostle of the Gentiles in his admirable epistle to the Romans, and especially in this chapter. To exalt Christ, was his constant aim, and he makes a beautiful comparison, or rather a contrast, between the first and the second Adam; wherein he proves that the grace of Christ was more powerful to save than the sin of Adam was to destroy; and he sums up the whole in the words of our text.

These words naturally divide themselves into two parts,

The awful abounding of sin, and

The superabounding of grace.

Let us first attend to the awful abounding of sin; and here allow me to premise that this is a subject

upon which we ought to enter with solemn awe; all the evils that we feel, or fear, proceed from sin. If pain and sorrow, death and the grave, hell and everlasting burnings, are awful, then must sin be deemed a horrible evil, for sin is the source from which they all proceed, and let me remind you that this is a subject in which every one of you is concerned; because all are sinners, whether they know it or not, and our sins will prove our ruin, if grace prevent it not, if this grace do not abound above and beyond all our sins.

What is sin? Few it may be feared have right notions of it? To swear, and be drunken, to rob, or to murder, is allowed by all men to be sinful; that which ruins a man's reputation, or injures society is allowed to be evil; but much that is deemed innocent by man, is abominable in the sight of God. Sin cannot be rightly known, but by an acquaintance with the holy law of God, for "sin is the transgression of the law, it is disobedience to that authority, which cannot be disputed: and if no evil were to arise from sin by way of punishment in the present world, or in that which is to come, still sin would be a detestable evil. Yes, persons may think that some sins are but trivial evils. Such, they may suppose, was eating of the forbidden fruit; and what was the evil of that sin, but disobedience against God, a defying the divine authority: and that is the real evil of sin which true penitents will always readily acknowledge as a great transgressor once did, when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Sin is an evil not only because it is injurious to society, but because it is an act of rebellion against God; it is undermining the divine government; and therefore it cannot but be hateful to Him whose law is holy, and just and good." We must therefore be somewhat acquainted with the divine law, if we would entertain just notions of sin. St. Paul says that "he was alive, without the law, once;" that is, when he was a

proud self-righteous Pharisee, but, " when the commandment came,"—when he understood the purity and spirituality of the law, he perceived, that he was a notorious and guilty sinner, condemned by the law of God. Indeed, this holy law condemns *all* men; for " whatever the law saith it saith to them that are under the law, that *every mouth* may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God," and the law thus understood will plainly shew how awfully sin abounds. Let us consider this in a few particulars—" sin abounds."

This appears in the first place from its extensive prevalence. It is not a *local* evil, like many natural evils, confined to one place, or limited to one age; but, it is an universal mischief; from the beginning until now, it has continued in its full force; and wherever human beings have been discovered, there it has been found that sin has reigned. The Apostle has shewn us in the first and second chapters of this masterly epistle, that the whole world is in a state of condemnation; it is a rebellious universe, the whole species is up in arms against God. However men may differ in their customs and manners,—men who never heard of each other, you will find, wherever you go, that sin reigns.

This appears also from the immense number of sins that are constantly committed. If we include, as we ought, our sins of omission, and our sins of thought,—who can enumerate his errors! With regard to the dispositions of our minds,—we are commanded to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength; and if we fall short of this, then we are transgressors. How many thousands of sins are committed in the imagination, from which perhaps no external act proceeds; " but the imaginations of the thoughts of men's hearts are only evil, continually." Gen. vi. 5. From the first dawn of reason, through infancy, childhood, youth, and riper years, even to the end of human life we are offending against God. We

behold the workings of sin, envy, pride, and rage, even in little infants. In short, we "are estranged from the womb, we go astray as soon as we be born, speaking lies;" if these evils be continued for forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years, how are our sins multiplied! We may well say, "Innumerable evils have compassed us about; our iniquities have taken hold upon us, so that we are not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of our head; therefore our hearts fail us." Psalm xl. 12.

Consider, further, the eagerness with which men sin; the earnestness with which they commit transgression. There is sin in our nature; the seeds of sin are in our constitution; but how are our iniquities cultivated by art; they become, as it were, a trade; "the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil;" the scriptures represent men to be sinning "as with a cart-rope;" "with both hands earnestly;" and what plans are formed for the execution of it, "man drinketh in iniquity like water," and some "sell themselves to do evil." Their language is, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die," and their sole object is "to fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

In some seasons and in some places iniquity unusually abounds; and persons arrive at a certain pitch of wickedness, beyond which God will not suffer them to go. Thus it was with the Canaanites, and the Amorites; with Sodom and Gomorrah; and with the Jews also; they "fill up the measure of their iniquities," till there be no remedy.

Consider also, the aboundings of sin in the aggravations of them. Some sins are extremely heinous in themselves; others are aggravated by the circumstances under which they are committed; thus, no doubt, Judas, with the knowledge he possessed, was far more criminal than Pilate. When sins are committed against knowledge, then are they aggravated. All sinners are "without excuse," but some are more inexcusable than others: and how

great must *our* sins be, considering the light and knowledge we have in this land of Bibles, and where there are so many godly ministers, who, like faithful watchmen, cry aloud, and point out to sinners their danger. Religious education tends greatly to aggravate the sins of those who continue in them; the sins of such persons are not like the sins of others who have lived all their days in careless, ungodly families; but, where the worship of God is maintained, day by day, and instruction afforded by pious parents, those who continue in iniquity, abusing such advantages, are sinners of the deepest dye. And when sins are committed against the special goodness and mercy of God, they are also greatly aggravated. This is the condition of many to whom God may say as to the Jews of old, "Hear O heavens, and give ear O earth, for I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." God is good to all,—"the earth is full of the riches of his goodness; he opens his hand, and supplies the want of every living thing:" but, O how is all this goodness of God abused! Let us consider what God has done for us, in making us rational creatures, capable of knowing and serving him, he has furnished us with all the members of body, and all the powers of the mind; has spread our table, and filled our cup, and rendered the whole creation tributary to our comfort; he has indulged us with a thousand delights; the clear shining of the sun; the pleasing light of the moon; the charming songs of the birds; the sweet fragrance of the flowers; the higher pleasures of domestic life,—the attention and affections of our dear relations. He has also granted us time and space for repentance; we have received many faithful warnings, many kind invitations; we have repeatedly felt convictions of our sin and misery, with which we have trifled; we have made many resolutions of amendment in times of sickness, which we have as frequently broken; we have escaped dangers by land and by water; we have had many ad-

monitions by the death of friends, and yet, perhaps we are continuing in sin to the present moment. O how does sin abound!

Sin will appear to abound if you advert to the calamitous effects which it has produced. The great and blessed God would not suffer his creatures to endure so much misery as they do, if he were not greatly displeased by their sins. The earth is cursed for man's sake; thorns and thistles it spontaneously produces; but bread must be produced by the sweat of his brow. How many are doomed to severe labour in the fields and in the mines! The mariner who ploughs the boisterous ocean; the wretched slave who toils in the burning field; all the labours and all the miseries of man prove that he is a sinful creature. Observe the disorder of the elements; the horrid glare of lightning; the terrific peals of thunder; the deluges of water; the sickening heat of sultry climes; the destructive winds; and the tremendous earthquake. Must not sin have abounded, to occasion these abounding mischiefs?

The prudence of man in framing human laws is another proof of the same truth. Why are bonds and oaths necessary in our affairs? Why must we have locks, and bolts, and bars to our habitations? Why must we have judges and magistrates, prisons and gibbets? The reason is that sin so much abounds.

Recollect also the numerous and painful diseases which invade the human frame; visit hospitals, sick chambers, madhouses, and other receptacles of human misery; and behold in them all a convincing proof that man has sinned, and that God is angry. Yea, brethren, look a little further, and contemplate the end of all men. There you have the strongest proof imaginable of the evil of sin; it has brought death into the world; "it is appointed to all men once to die; the body must see corruption; must return to the earth from whence it was taken." O then how does sin abound!

Before we proceed to the second part of the sub-

ject, let us make a pause. Let us not dismiss this serious topic without feeling its weight; let us be concerned to know this humbling truth, and to know it for ourselves; let the general doctrine come home to our hearts with the message of Nathan—"Thou art the man!" Surely, if we admit the truth of the scriptures, we must confess that we are miserable sinners, and that in our own case, sin has indeed abounded. This disposition of mind is pleasing to God, for to this man, he has promised to look, "even to him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, who trembles at his word." Blessed is the man that is "poor in spirit," who mourneth for his sin. Fools only make a mock of sin, but those who are truly wise, have a most humbling sensibility of their abounding transgressions and unworthiness.

Let us now proceed to the second part of our subject. We have seen, (shall we say we have *felt?*) that *sin* abounds: let us now contemplate the superaboundings of grace. Grace is a term but little known and rarely mentioned except in a way of contempt. "Grace" signifies "the free favour of God" towards sinful and undeserving creatures; and it stands opposed in scripture, to the merit or wages of works performed, as in Ephes. ii. 8, 9. "By grace are ye saved—not of works, lest any man should boast." It is carefully distinguished from that which might be thought meritorious, as in Rom. vi. 23. "The *wages* of sin is death; but the *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The doctrine of human merit is indeed flattering to the pride of man; but it is totally contrary to the grand principle of the gospel, which forbids all flesh to glory before God, and to ascribe the whole of salvation to pure unmerited mercy.

In the whole business of salvation, from first to last, grace abounds. It originates in the heart of God, who pitied us in our low estate; and devised

a plan of salvation, to us perfectly easy, to himself highly honourable. It was God, who, unasked, presented to the world that "unspeakable gift," his only begotten Son, in human nature; "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Grace is charmingly displayed in the glorious person, and the perfect work of the Son of God; "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich;" and because we, whom he designed to save, were partakers of flesh and blood, he partook of the same nature, and submitted to the deepest humiliation on our behalf. "The foxes," said he, "have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Such was his grace, that he patiently endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; and suffered, in a manner, which it is impossible to describe. Who can conceive what were the agonies of his holy soul, when he sweat, as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground? or, when bleeding to death on the cross, he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In this obedience unto death of Christ, consisted that righteousness, by which all believers are justified; and which, in the 19th verse of this chapter, is opposed to the disobedience of Adam, in whom we fell. "For as by one man's *disobedience* many were made sinners; so by the *obedience* of one shall many be made righteous."

Thus grace may be said to abound in the Gospel of Christ, which, on that account, is itself called, "the grace of God." St. Paul, writing to Titus, says, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation—teacheth us to live soberly," &c.—doubtless, he means that we are so instructed by the Gospel.

And in another place, writing to the Corinthians, he says, "We beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,"—that is, that ye neglect not to accept, and improve by the Gospel preached to you. And well may the Gospel bear this name, for it is the principal design of God in the Gospel to display this wonderful grace, and to shew how richly it abounds in the salvation of sinners: every page is full of it; nor does that deserve the name of Gospel in which it does not obviously abound.

Further. Grace exceedingly abounds in the free and full justification of the sinner, who believes. St. Paul, describing his own case in the first epistle to Timothy, chapter the first, and the fourteenth verse, says,—after mentioning his former depravity and guilt, "the grace of our Lord was *exceeding abundant*, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." He was surprised and astonished when he reflected on the free favour of God, bestowed upon so great a transgressor. And in the last verse of this chapter, wishing to extol the grace of God as highly as possible, he says, "that, as sin reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Here he compares grace to a mighty monarch—Grace *reigns*, presides, and governs with majestic superiority, in the grand affair of human salvation, worthy of the highest honours.

One idea more is necessary; it is not only said that "grace abounds," but that it "much more abounds." We have endeavoured to show that sin does awfully abound; but the Apostle says, that though sin does abound, yet grace does "much more abound:" and he not only speaks of a likeness between the first and second Adam, but he also speaks of that which is not alike, verse 15. "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift: for if through the offence of one many be dead; much more, the grace of God, and the gift by grace, hath abounded unto many: and not as it was by one that

sinned, so the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification:" the meaning of which seems to be that we derive more from Christ than we lost in Adam. No doubt, the condition to which God will finally raise his saints in the heavenly world, will be far superior to that which man enjoyed in his original state; and the soul, clothed with the righteousness of God our Saviour, will shine with greater lustre than Adam ever did in his own primitive righteousness.

"Clothed in this robe, how bright I shine?
Angels might envy such a dress.
Angels have not a robe like mine—
The robe of Jesu's righteousness!"

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when the Saviour shall appear, we shall be like him;" we shall be made kings and priests unto God; we shall be raised to a state of dignity and glory, sitting down with Christ himself upon his throne of glory. "Such honour will have all his saints!" And thus it will appear, in a manner we cannot yet fully comprehend, that "where sin abounded, the grace of God doth much more abound."

IMPROVEMENT.

To conclude—Let us diligently study the doctrine of grace. "It is a good thing that the heart be established in grace"—in the doctrine of grace: for true religion does not consist in outward ceremonies, even those of God's appointment; it is something infinitely superior. Let us therefore "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" this will be found the best, the most useful, and the most delightful kind of knowledge; and those who have acquired it, will say with the Apostle, "Yea doubtless, and

I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him."

Let us be concerned, above all things, to be partakers of this grace. Be not content to hear of it, as persons unconcerned, but seek to be personally partakers of it. Shall we neglect it? Shall we suffer any of the concerns of this life, however pressing, or any of its enjoyments, however pleasing, to divert our souls from this greatest of all concerns? God forbid!

——— "It were contemning
With impious self-sufficient arrogance,
The bounty of our God, not to accept
With every mark of honour—such a gift!"

Awfully, indeed, are they mistaken who would substitute any thing in its stead; or put their own works of righteousness in the place of the righteousness of Christ. And what will poor sinners do at the last day without this grace? O consider, that death is at hand, and what an awful thing will it be to die without the grace of God. Your sins, alas! have abounded, and will not deserved punishment also abound? It will, unless this grace shall superabound. Seek it then by earnest prayer, "seek and ye shall find."

What a source is here of consolation, even for the chief of sinners. Does guilt oppress your conscience, and fears alarm your souls? Are you saying—"You know not what a sinner I have been—singular—excessive in sinning." It may be so. I know that you cannot over-rate your sins, but mark the encouraging words of our text—"Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound;" and why should it not be so in your case?

What abundant cause is here for praise—ardent, constant praise! If Abraham, at a distance, saw the day of Christ and was glad, how much more cause have you, believer, who have tasted that the Lord is actually gracious, to rejoice in his salvation. Adopt then the prophet's language of exultation. Isaiah lxi. 10. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

Finally. This subject furnishes us with a mighty incentive to holiness. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The Apostle offers this query, because he knew that this objection would be started, but he replies, "God forbid! how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein." Rather, let grace constrain us, cheerfully and sincerely, to devote ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to the honour and glory of the God of all grace, which is, indeed, "our reasonable service."

SERMON LXXXVI.

JERUSALEM LAMENTED.

Luke, xix. 41, 42. And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

JESUS CHRIST had a tender heart. Compassion to the miserable was the leading feature of his character. At all times, we observe this in his conduct towards the children of sorrow; this was his prevailing disposition; he was himself "a man of sorrows," and he had always an ear to listen to the tale of woe, a heart to feel for the afflicted, and a hand to afford them relief. But the display of his compassion, at the time referred to in the text, deserves particular attention; for what were his circumstances, when he thus wept, and uttered these pathetic words? It was at the only season of his sojourning here upon earth, that we behold him enjoying any kind of triumph: he was approaching Jerusalem for the last time, when a vast multitude of people, perhaps more than a million, were in that great city; numbers of whom had come from Galilee and other parts of the country, to celebrate the feast of the passover. Having heard that he was about to enter the metropolis, in a more public manner than he ever did before, they were overjoyed with the thought of seeing him, hearing him, and beholding his miracles: so

that, in great multitudes, they went forth to meet him. This more than usual curiosity was excited by a miracle which he had recently performed; he had raised Lazarus, his friend, from the dead, at a little town not far from Jerusalem:—there were many respectable witnesses of the fact; it was noised about the country, and great multitudes had been induced to believe upon him, as it is said, in the 12th chapter of St. John, "Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus; and on the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." And as you see in the 37th verse of this chapter, "when he was come nigh, even at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice, and praise God with a loud voice, for all the mighty works that they had seen."

The acclamations of the multitude, however, did not elate him; "he knew what was in man," and he foresaw that many of the multitude who were now crying "Hosanna," would as loudly cry, "Crucify him, crucify him." Let *us* also beware of placing much confidence upon human applause; for a very little matter will turn the scale of public opinion, and the warm friend of to-day, may be the bitter enemy of to-morrow. Other thoughts occupied the holy, the benevolent mind of Jesus. From a small distance, he commanded a view of this great city; great in extent, population, and magnificence; great especially on account of the sumptuous temple that was there erected; and, although the Saviour had already suffered many hardships from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and well knew that he should suffer still more in a few days; yet, such was his divine benevolence and compassion that, forgetting himself, he bitterly wept at the foresight of those dire and unpa-

ralleled calamities which he knew would, in a few years, befal that guilty and devoted city; for, as he says in the 43d verse, "the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children with thee." All this actually came to pass; and the Romans, who besieged Jerusalem, thought it necessary to build a wall, extending nearly five miles, entirely round the city, to prevent its inhabitants from escaping; and by reducing them to famine, and by other means, bringing upon them irretrievable ruin, so that in a course of time, more than a million of Jews were put to death; eleven thousand of them were crucified, and they only stopped crucifying them, because no more wood could be procured to make crosses; while many of these who were not put to death were sold at a penny a man. Our Lord foresaw all this, and he wept. But, doubtless he looked further than to the destruction of Jerusalem; he looked forward to the eternal state of the multitude. Probably, far the greatest part of this multitude, "died in their sins;" and he also looked to the future consequences of this destruction and consequent dispersion of the nation; he foresaw what would befal the devoted race of Judah for 1800 years; during which, the far greater part have died in ignorance and sin. Well might he, who foresaw all this, weep! he wept, amidst his own meek triumphs; far more concerned for others than for himself; and notwithstanding the foresight of his own approaching sufferings, as he afterwards said to some of the women who lamented his fate, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

Now the case of Jerusalem speaks aloud to us. There are things which belong to *our* peace; there is a limited season in which we may acquire the knowledge of these things; and there is a worse destruction than that of the Jews awaiting us, if we

finally disregard them. These are the three parts of our intended discourse.

First. There are some things which are absolutely necessary to be known, in order to our eternal peace, "if thou hadst known the things which belong to thy peace."

"That the soul be without knowledge," said the most knowing of mankind, "is not good;" for, indeed, "it is eternal life to know God, and his Son Jesus Christ." What are the things that must needs be known? They are "the things of the Gospel;" "the things of God;" "the things of the Spirit of God,"—so they are denominated in scripture. These were the things which Christ and his Apostles had set before the Jews: and these are the things which the great God now sets before us; especially, the things which relate to the salvation of our souls by Jesus Christ. It is necessary to know the *doctrine* of the Gospel, the *power* of the Gospel, and the *practice* of the Gospel.—But to mention a very few particulars.

It is necessary that we should know our real state and condition as sinners; as being apostate, depraved, polluted, and helpless creatures. Great is the value and utility of self-knowledge, especially in religion. To know ourselves aright, we must know that we are "by nature, children of wrath;" for "the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." We must be convinced of our actual guilt, and that we are under the curse of the broken law; for "it is written—Cursed is every one, that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." We must so know these things that "our mouth must be stopped, and we must become confessedly guilty before God;" we must know that "the wages of sin is death;" we must not plead for sin, as many do, for "the end of these things is death." We must know our own helplessness, or inability, by any thing within our own power, to relieve ourselves; for "we have destroyed our-

selves, and our help is found in God alone." This doctrine of scripture we must understand as applied to ourselves; and we must be sincerely and habitually concerned to be delivered from this state. This must be the grand desire of our souls,—the "one thing needful,"—so as to induce us from the heart, to cry, "God be merciful to us sinners." It is necessary to our true and spiritual peace, that our natural and carnal peace should be disturbed; that the security we feel through ignorance should be terminated; for "while the strong man armed keepeth the house, and all things remain in peace," we seek not the salvation that is from above; but this peace being happily disturbed, we are glad to seek peace from another quarter.

Besides this, we must have an acquaintance with the gospel of Christ, as affording us the only, and the all-sufficient remedy—we must be acquainted with the Gospel in order to know the way of peace with God, and safety to the soul; and this is abundantly revealed in the Gospel. Christ alone is our peace-maker; he has "made peace by the blood of his cross;" "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their iniquities." Jesus having been "made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we who believe might be made the righteousness of God in him;" and, as St. Paul tells us in the 5th of Romans, and at the beginning, it is by "being justified through faith, that we come into a state of peace with God," "we have access,"—free admission and introduction into an excellent and permanent state of full acceptance with God, as persons acquitted of every charge, and brought into a condition of safety and honour, so that we may "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." These are some of the things that belong to your peace, and things that must be known.

Secondly. There is a certain, limited season, in which the knowledge of these things may be acquired. Our Lord says, in the text, "If thou

hadst known, even *in this thy day.*" The Jews had *their* day; their season of visitation; for, "at sundry times, and in divers manners, did God speak unto them by the prophets; and latterly, he spoke unto them by his Son from heaven." "If thou hadst known," says the Lord, "even thou, *Jerusalem!* O highly favoured place, distinguished as it was above all the cities upon the earth,"—if *thou* hadst known—and may not this be applied to our case, as a nation singularly favoured of God, with the means of religious light and information? May it not be said to many a person here present, "If *thou* hadst known?" May it not be said to those who have had a religious education—who have had opportunities, from their childhood, to become acquainted with the things that belong to their peace—"If *thou* hadst known?" Surely, to such, they should be known, at least, now, "after so long a time." Now, if not before; at least, *now!*

The Jews had long enjoyed the means of grace; but the season of visitation was then drawing to a close—about forty years, and there would be a complete end. They had treated the Gospel with contempt, and, as our Lord declared, "they should go their way, and should seek him, but they should not find him."

But we may apply the term "day," to peculiar and favourable seasons—"If thou hadst known, in this thy day."

In the first place, LIFE, generally, may be called "a day;" indeed it is but a day; a short day, and a winter's day: but it ought to be a working day—"If thou hadst known in this *thy day.*" "Are there not twelve hours in which men should work?" how is it then that some continue "idle all the day long," when this is the great business of life—"the one thing needful!" It is said, by the wise man, most emphatically, "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and, to depart from evil, is understanding:" and Solomon, at the close of his book of Wis-

dom, having solemnly and repeatedly declared the vanity of the world, says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man,"—*the whole* of man (for the word duty is supplied) this is the *great concern;* the interest, business, and life of man.

I may say likewise that YOUTH is the season in which it is peculiarly proper to attend to the things which belong to our peace; "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." What can be more reasonable and proper than that the first and chief of all objects, should have the first and chief regard; and doubtless the season of youth is the most suitable and friendly for this purpose. There are infirmities and hindrances which occur to the aged, who are constrained to say of their latter days, "there is no pleasure in them." O young people, consider, I beseech you, these words of Christ as addressed to you,—if *thou* hadst known even that, in this thy day—the day of youth, and health, and activity, these important things.

Further, let me observe that the SABBATH is a very proper and favourable season for attending to these great concerns. On this holy day, persons have not the same excuses as on other days. There is no pressure of those worldly affairs which must be regarded on other days: but the "things that belong to our peace" are, if I may so say, "the order of the day," and nothing ought to interfere with them; especially when they are presented to our minds by the preaching of the Gospel. They are then brought, as it were, before our eyes, so that as the scripture speaks, we need not say, Who shall ascend into heaven to bring them down, or who shall dive into the deep to fetch them up; "*The word* is nigh thee; it is in thy mouth, and in thy heart, even the word of faith which we preach." Let the hearer of the Gospel know this, that the kingdom of God is brought near unto him. God,

angels, and devils too, observe what attention we pay to the heavenly message, and what effects are produced by it. Angels gladly carry the news of good impressions; and upon the conversion of sinners they gladden heaven with the tidings; and if angels could weep, (as the Lord of angels did) if would be at the folly and madness of sinful men disregarding the proposals of salvation. This time of hearing is an important time,—more important than many apprehend. To many a person it may seem a matter of indifference whether he hears the word seriously and attentively, or suffer his imagination to rove; but certain it is, that by every sermon a man hears, he is taking a step nearer to heaven or nearer to hell; he is either receiving a benefit to his soul, or he is hardening his heart.

May not these words be emphatically addressed to the AGED, "at least in this *your* day." Verily it may be said to the aged people, "Now, or never;" hear ye, the word of God, lest ye should die in your sins.

Thirdly and lastly. It is a matter of grievous lamentation when this opportunity is lost.

Our Lord when he thought of it wept; he wept when he uttered these words, "If thou hadst known, even thou—but now they are hid from thine eyes." The calamities of the Jews, which he clearly foresaw, were extremely great; they were unparalleled in the history of nations; the world, with all its troubles, never saw the like before, nor ever will again; the discord, the malice, the famine, the disease, the self-murders, the burnings of houses, and falling of buildings, the death of multitudes—all contributed to form that sum of unspeakable calamity which our Lord foresaw, and the prospect of which made him weep. But fearful as this destruction was, yet the misery of damned souls in hell will be far greater; yea, the sufferings of each individual soul, will at some future period, have

been greater than the sum total of all the sufferings, endured by the hundreds of thousands who perished in Jerusalem!—O think of eternity; think of thousands and thousands of years past, and thousands and thousands more to be added to their number; yea, millions of ages,—as many millions of ages as there have been drops of rain from the beginning of the Creation; as many millions of ages as there have been leaves upon all the trees, or sands upon the sea shore;—and supposing all these to have come, and to be past—yet, eternal ages more are still to succeed. The capacious mind of Him who was himself, from eternity, could not but weep when he contemplated these distant objects; and, surely our hearts must be as hard as stones, if we can think of them without feeling compassion both for ourselves and for others.

But *when* may it be said that these things are hid from men's eyes?

In the first place, when the means of grace are removed. The Lord threatened the church of Ephesus, when she left her first love, that "the candlestick (or lamp) should be removed out of its place;" the lamp signified the ministry of the Gospel in the church. When the Lord removes the preaching of his Gospel from a particular place, in town or country, it is an awful event. How often has it happened in such cases that a faithful minister has been succeeded by a poor blind guide; thus also it frequently happens, in the course of human affairs, that persons have been removed from places where they heard the Gospel faithfully preached, to situations where it was not to be heard. There are many servants who hear the word in consequence of their living in pious families; but by and by they are removed, and either attend no place of worship at all, or if they do, hear nothing but error: then, alas! are these things hid from their eyes. Many there are who, having no love for the Gospel, make no scruple of removing, for the sake of convenience, to situations where the Gospel is not preached, and

then these things by their own negligence are hidden from their eyes. And, in large congregations, perhaps a Sabbath does not pass, on which some persons are not hearing the truth for the last time; so that, though they may perhaps live many years after, yet they hear the Gospel no more! It is an awful thought to ministers, and ought to be so to all their hearers.

Again, these things may be said to be hidden from men's eyes when the heart becomes hard and insensible; and this is no uncommon thing. "Take heed," said the Apostle of the Gentiles, "lest your hearts be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin." Many hearers of the word become "Sermon-proof." They have heard the solemn truths of the scripture so frequently, and to so little purpose, that, at length, they make no impression at all. We rarely hear of the conversion of persons at an advanced period of life, who have long heard the Gospel in vain. Yet, this is not impossible, for nothing is "too hard for the Lord." Habits of sin dreadfully harden. When conscience has long remonstrated in vain, it ceases to remonstrate; and an offended God, whose patience is wearied out, may justly say to the confirmed sinner, as to Ephraim of old—"Ephraim is joined to idols—let him alone!"

Above all, it may be truly said, and with an awful emphasis, that these things are hid from men's eyes, when life is closed;—closed, alas, before the great business of life is finished, or even begun; and, O how soon, and, sometimes, how suddenly does life close? for "what is it, but a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." How many instances are there of persons suddenly removed, some, it may be, sitting at the table, others walking in the streets, and others while lying on their beds, who retired to rest in usual health. And what security have you or I, that this may not be the case with us? And should not sudden death prove our lot, how often does it happen that the

body is visited with such distracting pains, as entirely to prevent any serious thoughts! How often does fever almost totally incapacitate the mind for reflection! Restlessness, attention to medicine, to sleep, and so on, so occupy the mind, that after all, death comes at an unexpected moment; and when death closes the scene, then are these things hid, for ever hid from our eyes. Upon such occasions, no doubt, pious relations would weep, as Christ wept upon this occasion; and how bitter must be such sorrow. O thou my wife, my husband, my child? hadst thou but known the things that belonged to thy peace; but, I fear, that now they are hidden for ever from thine eyes. This is the bitterness of sorrow—the very "gall of bitterness." But when a relation or a friend dies "in the Lord," we feel immediate consolation, assured, that our loss is his eternal gain;—I am mourning but he is rejoicing. On the contrary, if there be reason to fear the worst, ministers too must bitterly lament, and say, "We have all the day long stretched out our hands to a gainsaying people." "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed!" But, if others lament this catastrophe, how must the lost soul herself lament it! this will be the very emphasis of suffering in the eternal world! O fool that I was, how did I spend my time? What was I doing all the days of my life? How came I to neglect my Bible? How could I shut my ears to the calls of ministers and friends? What wretched trifling will this life appear when the business of life was wholly neglected, and the amusements of sense occupied my time! Many a soul will say—O had I "spent my time in reading my Bible and in prayer, instead of spending it in vain conversation, amusements, and dress, I might have avoided this misery; but now, these things are hid from my eyes."

Thus I have endeavoured to shew you; 1. that there are things which belong to our peace; 2. that there is a limited time in which the knowledge of

these things may be acquired; and 3. that it is a matter of deep lamentation when they are neglected and are hid for ever from men's eyes.

To conclude. As these are things necessary to be known, let none then plead for ignorance, or foolishly pretend that they know enough already. This is the language of many, but it is a sure proof that as yet they know nothing as they ought. If there are things that belong to our peace, and they must be known, Do we apply our hearts to wisdom? Do we know them?—especially our state by nature, and the means of salvation by Jesus Christ? Is there a limited time in which they must be known? O then, seize the golden opportunity. Why should not men be as wise for eternity, as for time?—for their souls as well as for their bodies? In the management of human affairs, we seek to improve the proper season. The husbandman does this, the mechanic, the tradesman, the merchant, have all their proper seasons, and they attend to business, if they are wise men, at those proper seasons. O let us do so, in those things that belong to our peace; let us not neglect the Bible, or the means of grace, or prayer. We have now another Sabbath evening to spend; let us spend it profitably; let not these golden hours be lost in folly, but, while it is called to-day, let us hear the voice of the Son of God, and live.

Finally. Let those rejoice and be thankful who have attended to these things, so that the great affair is settled; the great business of life is accomplished! O give praise to God for his goodness. Upon such an occasion, Christ rejoiced, and said, "Father, I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, that though these things are hidden from the wise and prudent, they are revealed unto babes, even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight;" let us praise God for his special, distinguishing grace, and give him glory, now, and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON LXXXVII.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE CROSS.

John xii. 32. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

THE sufferings of our blessed Lord had this peculiarity in them,—they were all exactly foreseen. In great mercy God hides from us the particular trials we shall hereafter endure. He knows our infirmities, and that the foresight of future calamities would not only deprive us of present enjoyment, but prevent our activity and usefulness in the world. But the Lord Jesus Christ (the speaker in our text) had an exact foreknowledge of all the sufferings he was to endure; and he often dropped a hint concerning them to his disciples, though they knew not well what he meant. To Nicodemus he had long before said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up;" and when he was journeying to Jerusalem, for the last time, he said to his disciples, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and to the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and scourge him, and spit upon him, and shall kill him, and the third day he shall rise

again." Yet, with all these sufferings full in view, he was vigorous and active in all the work which the Father had given him to do, and never shrunk from his arduous undertaking, though he knew that suffering and death were at hand. Homer exalts the character of his hero Achilles, because, when going forth to the Trojan war, he knew he should fall in the conflict. Far greater was the fortitude of our Divine Saviour, who had in certain prospect, sufferings infinitely greater; so that it was truly said by our British poet, that

> "This was compassion like a God,
> That when the Saviour knew
> The price of pardon was his blood,
> His pity ne'er withdrew."

These words of our text were spoken on a memorable occasion. Some pious strangers coming to Jerusalem, expressed to his disciples a wish to be introduced to him; "they desired to see Jesus." Our Lord rejoiced, because it was a prelude to the introduction of us poor Gentiles into his church; but before this could take place, he must die; for as a grain of wheat must first perish in the earth, before it is productive of fruit, so must Jesus become a sacrifice for sin by his death, that those who believe in him may not perish, but have everlasting life. And then observe in our text the happy effect. He, the blessed Redeemer, having been lifted up upon the cross, exalted to glory, and exhibited in the Gospel, he shall prove the grand attractive, the heavenly loadstone; he shall, by the preaching of his Gospel, and by the influence of his Spirit, draw to himself, in faith, and love, and obedience, 'all men," that is, all true Christians, in every country, and in every age. Yes, millions of millions of immortal souls, saved from sin, and hell, and the grave, shall forsake all and cleave to him, so that nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

From these pleasing and instructive words we shall take occasion to consider,

First. "*The elevation of the blessed Jesus upon the cross;*"—"the Son of man shall be lifted up."

Secondly. *The attractive effect of that elevation;* "I will draw all men unto me."

We are first to consider the elevation of the blessed Jesus upon the cross; for this is, doubtless, intended, as appears from the words immediately following the text—"this he spake, signifying what death he should die."

And here let us reflect both upon the *matter of fact* itself; and upon the *great design* of it. The matter of fact itself is deeply interesting and affecting. Behold the *Sufferer!* He is no ordinary person. He is a great; He is an innocent; He is a benevolent; yea, he is a divine person. The sufferings of the great and noble, of princes, and kings, usually excite peculiar interest. When did ever such a glorious person suffer? "They killed the prince of life;" "they crucified the Lord of glory:" and, if a person, *innocent* as well as exalted, expire like a criminal, what sympathy is excited! Never was there so innocent a sufferer as the Lord Jesus; it never could be said of any other, "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" for he was the holy "Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot." If a person of unusual *benevolence* suffer, every heart throbs with sorrow, if not with indignation; but never was there a sufferer so benevolent as Jesus; his heart was all goodness and tenderness, and he had spent all his time and his strength in going about to do good. O, if all the objects of his tender compassion had been collected around his cross, what an affecting group would they have formed! If all the persons whose eyes he had opened, whose ears he had unstopped, whose

limbs he had restored, whose diseases he had healed, whose sorrows he had assuaged,—had they all been gathered around the tree, what a numerous body would they have been! and would they not have been ready to exclaim, He must not die; or, if he must die, let us die with him: but the bulk of the spectators was very differently affected. Filled with rage, they added insult to cruelty, and they took a savage delight in his shame and torment. His glory was indeed veiled, and to the eyes of sense he appeared a forlorn and deserted malefactor; yet amidst all his sufferings, there were some enlightened persons who "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Yea, the more thoughtful among the multitude were deeply affected with the awful prodigies which attended his crucifixion; and were constrained to say, "Surely this was the Son of God!"

Contemplate his sufferings, and say if ever there were "any sorrow like unto his sorrow." He was indeed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" but the keenest sufferings were reserved to the last. When "his hour" was approaching, hear what he says, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" shall I say, "Father, save me from this hour?" No; he would not say that, because it was for that very purpose that he was come into the world.

Consider the agonies of his soul in the garden of Gethsemane. Think of them, you who have pleasant gardens; while you tread on the smooth walks, behold the beautiful flowers, and inhale their various sweets—think of the Lord of life and glory, in that garden where, to expiate the sins which first commenced in Eden, "he was sorrowful and very heavy;" he was "sorrowful even unto death." The agony of his soul forced great drops of blood from every pore of his body. Behold him prostrate on the cold ground, embracing, as it were, the dust for us, who are sinful dust and ashes, that he might raise us to

mansions above the stars. Hear his doleful cries. He had been accustomed to suffer, but not to complain: but now, he could no more be silent. "My soul, said he, is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Abba, Father; all things are possible with thee. O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done: and again, being in an agony, he prayed the more earnestly," "pouring out strong cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death."

At length the traitor arrives, at the head of an armed banditti: the hypocritical Judas betrays him. Jesus speaks; and his adversaries fall, like dead men, to the ground; they rise, and renew the assault; he submits, and is bound; he is carried away like a criminal. O what sorrows succeeded throughout that tedious night! while he was hurried from place to place—to the house of Caiaphas, of Pilate, of Herod, and Pilate again. He was falsely accused, and cruelly condemned. O what base falsehoods, what gross injustice! Smitten upon the cheek—spit upon—crowned with sharp thorns—and severely scourged in the Roman manner. See him, bearing, weary and spent, the heavy cross upon his bleeding shoulders! He is stretched, at length, upon the accursed tree; his hands and feet nailed to it with large spikes; from thence suspended, bleeding and agonizing, for several hours; exposed to the insults and mockery of an enraged multitude! In the mean time, there were sufferings far more severe than any that could be inflicted upon his body by the hands of wicked men—agonies that excruciated his whole soul! Who can explain the meaning of those mysterious words—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Yet, amidst all this scene of woe; heaven appears to commiserate. The sun, as if ashamed of the atrocious deed, withdrew its light, and the rocks, less insensible than the hearts of men, were cleft asunder; the solid earth itself was convulsed; and the graves, as if conscious

they could not long retain their prey, were seen to open, ready to resign it. Such are the outlines of the history itself, when that glorious sufferer was lifted up on the cross.

But what could be the design of all this? Is there not something greatly mysterious in it, that such a person should suffer, and suffer in such a manner? The Gospel affords a key to the whole. It tells us that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son;" it tells us that one man must die for the people, "the just for the unjust;" that, if man be pardoned, a satisfaction must be made; and who could make it, but the Son of God himself? For this purpose he voluntarily engaged. "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The sacrifice is made. "It is finished," said the expiring Saviour: and it is accepted, for, lo, he rises from the dead, and ascends into heaven. God is well pleased; so pleased, that he commands this Gospel of his dear Son to be made known to the whole world; he commissions his servants to go and proclaim it to every creature under heaven; he furnishes them with miraculous powers, to enable them to do it. They proclaim "peace by Jesus Christ," wherever they go, and invite the greatest sinners to come to God through him; assuring them that "whosoever cometh to the Father by him, shall not be cast out," but be accepted, pardoned, and saved. Thus it was that "he was lifted up," and by this elevation he draws men unto him—which is

The second thing we were to contemplate. "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." To the carnal eye there was nothing at all attractive in the original spectacle. Men saw nothing at Calvary, but ignominy, and suffering, and disgrace; and notwithstanding the miracles with which the first gospel ministers pro-

claimed the word, how was it received? To the Jews it was a stumbling-block; to the Greeks it was foolishness. Men, in general, saw no beauty nor glory in a crucified Saviour; they were rather disgusted, and rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Nevertheless, the cross of Christ is that grand engine which God himself hath planted, and by which he will effectually draw millions of souls to himself, even all whom he hath ordained to everlasting life; and "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."—Not, indeed, all individuals; for all are not drawn: but, all sorts of men; and in all ages; and in all countries, whithersoever his gospel is carried.—"I will draw *all* men unto me."

This expression, reminds us of our distance and alienation from the great and blessed God. We are far from God; but we are not at all inclined to return to him; there is an aversion of heart; "the carnal mind," sad to say, "is enmity against God;" and the language of it is, even to the blessed God himself, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And from this dangerous distance, we never can be restored, but by the special grace of God. So our Lord speaks in the sixth chapter of this gospel, in the forty-fourth verse, "No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day." And, in another place, he says, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life." The fact is, they *cannot*, because they *will* not; the fault is in the will; and this is extremely criminal; it is a desperate criminality of heart that keeps men at a distance from God, and keeps them from him, when there is such an attractive spectacle as this exhibited to their view.

Further, the expression "drawing," denotes the sweet, persuasive, and powerful manner, in which souls are brought to Christ. It is expressed in similar phraseology by the prophet Hosea; "I

drew them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love." To an enlightened mind, and to a renewed heart, nothing can appear so rational, so desirable, so beneficial, so delightful, as a compliance with the commands of the gospel. In the common occurrences of human life, men are attracted by interest or by pleasure; they are very ready to embrace measures that promise them safety and profit; and should it not be so in religion too. The first attractive in religion is SAFETY. In imminent danger, men catch eagerly at the first means of deliverance. If a house be on fire, how gladly will the inhabitant adopt the readiest means of escape. If a person be in danger of drowning, he will eagerly catch fast hold of any thing that is at hand, and never quit his grasp, but with safety, or with death. If the body be dangerously diseased, how welcome is skilful advice, and potent medicines; for "all that a man hath he will give for his life:" and, should men give less for their souls? No, not when they are brought in earnest to cry "What shall I do to be saved?" and when that cry is heard in heaven, ready is the answer that is given, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Christ, the great Deliverer is at hand, able and ready to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

This was strikingly illustrated by our blessed Lord when he conferred with Nicodemus, and said (in the third of John and fourteenth verse) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Israelites, stung with fiery serpents, were in imminent danger of death. They were told, that safety, and health, and life might be obtained, by one look at the appointed object. They looked and lived. In like manner, the convinced sinner gladly turns to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is invited so to do, and he

is always welcome when he applies; nor shall any one look to the Saviour in vain.

Again, not only safety, but PLEASURE is a powerful attractive. The love of pleasure is universal. Every person born into the world possesses it; but, alas! it is the love of *sinful pleasures* that proves the ruin of all mankind; but, in the Gospel, there are offered to us pleasures that are pure, that are cheap, that are lasting; "Wisdom's ways are pleasantness; all her paths are peace;" even "the peace that passeth all understanding"—"the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory;—the hope that maketh not ashamed." These are freely offered to us in the Gospel; the delights of communion with God, the pleasure of reading his word, attending his house and ordinances, and enjoying communion with his people. These, and many, many more pleasures, are offered to us; and these are strongly attractive to all those who are taught of God.

There is also something that is sweetly attractive in the condescension and benevolence of our superiors. When persons far above us in rank, shew a disinterested concern for our welfare, and are willing to take pains, and deny themselves, to confer a favour upon us, it powerfully attracts the soul, and excites grateful feelings in every generous mind. And thus also it is in religion. Behold an instance of it in the woman, of whom you read in the seventh chapter of St. Luke, who followed our Lord to the house of the Pharisee; and there, we find, she plentifully watered the feet of our blessed Lord with the tears of penitence and gratitude; she also anointed them with rich and odoriferous ointment, attracting the notice of all who were in the house, and exciting the resentment of the proud, self-righteous Pharisee: but our blessed Lord vindicates and commends her conduct, and says, "I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much."—This it is, that accounts for the active services and energies of the ministers of God,

in all ages, who most gladly spend and are spent in the service, and for the glory of their divine Lord. When St. Paul speaks of his own labours and sufferings, with those also of his companions, he says, "We are troubled on every side; we are perplexed; we are persecuted; we are delivered to death for Jesus' sake:" Yet all this was calmly endured and joyfully suffered! And why was all this! How could it be accounted for! He tells us, "the love of Christ constraineth us; for we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and it was for this end, that we should not hereafter live to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again."

And here, likewise, is the centre of Christian communion. This accounts for that harmony and concord, which, in the greatest and best respects, is found among all the followers of Christ, however varied their denominations may be, because it is one and the same great object that has attracted them all, and brought them altogether. "When Shiloh comes," said the people, "to him shall the gathering of the people be. He is the root of Jesse, and to him shall the Gentiles be assembled;" yea, according to the promise, "He shall gather together in one, all things in heaven and in earth."

Here, then, is a brief summary of the religion of Jesus Christ, Christ lifted up, upon the cross, as our atoning sacrifice; and the blessed effects of this, upon the hearts of all believers—"If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me."

Now let us enquire, What do we know of this attraction? Let me entreat every one of you to ask the question. I have heard of this attraction; what do I know of it? Am I one of those so drawn? All men are drawn by something apparently good—by pleasure or by interest, or by wisdom, but chiefly by the world; this is the great magnet: there are few comparatively that are drawn to Christ, but

multitudes are drawn away from him; and for what? for what, I ask, do you neglect Jesus? Think, O think in time, how much you will hereafter need him; anticipate the solemn hour, when you must die; nor think it a melancholy business to anticipate it, for it will come, it will surely come; and unless you have been drawn to Jesus, how awful will that hour be! When flesh and heart are failing, what will you do without Christ? You may do without him *now;* in the midst of your worldly engagements and pleasures, you may contrive to fill up your time, thoughtless of Christ and salvation; but what will you do when you come to die? What will you do when you are called to stand at the bar of God? If he be not your friend, better had it been for you that you had never been born. Turn away your eyes then from beholding vanity. Turn them to the blessed Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God," who is now evidently set before you, as a crucified Saviour. At this moment his language is, "Look unto me, and ye shall be saved, all the ends of the earth."

I would now say, What a glorious object is a crucified Saviour! Let mistaken men, let sensualists, let rationalists, pour contempt upon the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; but here will our hearts fix, nor shall conspiring worlds be able to drive us thence. Here will we live; here will we die. It is here we find every religious advantage—every thing we can desire. Do we want pardon? He who hung on the cross is "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." Do we want peace? Like them of old, we "look unto him, and are lightened." Do we wish to feel godly sorrow in our hearts? "We look to him who was pierced, and we mourn; we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes." Do we desire victory over sin? Only he who died *for* sin, can strengthen us to die *to* it; and "he will subdue our iniquities." One look at Jesus will prove, as one said,

" both law and gospel to us." Do we want heaven itself, or hope for happiness? There, even there, will Jesus be the grand attractive object; and the essence of the heavenly glory will consist in " seeing him as he is;" in seeing " the Lamb that once was slain;" but who is now, " the Lamb in the midst of the throne;" and there shall we be with him, where he is, and behold his glory. Well then may we most cordially unite with the Apostle of the Gentiles, and say, " God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory everlasting. Amen.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

BAPTISM NOT REGENERATION.

John i. 13. Which were BORN not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of GOD.

ONE of the most plain and important doctrines revealed in the word of God is that of the guilty and dangerous state of man, as a fallen creature. The testimony of the scripture is, that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;" that "the whole world is guilty before God;" that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," those only excepted who are "born of God."—This is the true state of man; of every man, by nature: but God, of his infinite mercy, "remembered us in our low estate;" and devised means for our deliverance. He determined to send, both his SON and his SPIRIT into the world. He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to be a propitiation for our sins;" he also gave his Holy Spirit for the purpose of changing our natural dispositions, enabling us to "die unto sin, and live unto righteousness," that so we may serve him in this world, and "be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Both these gifts are equally requisite:—the former respects justification; the latter respects sanctification, or the habit and disposition of our souls towards him.

This change, in scripture, is represented as a *very*

great change; not a partial, but a universal change; not merely external, but an internal change. It is such a change as is properly called "a new birth"—a resurrection from the dead—a new creation. The term whereby it is usually described in scripture is Regeneration, or the New Birth.

One of the most memorable passages in which this doctrine is maintained, is in the third chapter of St. John's gospel; where we read of a conversation between our blessed Saviour, and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. In that discourse, the nature of the change is explained; the necessity of it insisted upon; and the objections to it are answered; and while the world endures this passage will continue to be an impregnable fortress, in which this grand truth will be preserved. From this scripture it appears that religion is a supernatural change of the heart of man; or, as it is most strikingly expressed in the words of our text, a being *born of God.*

But at various times certain divines have maintained that regeneration is merely baptism with water; that every person duly baptized is born again; and that no other regeneration is to be expected in this world.

One of these divines expresses himself in the following manner: "Those who are baptized are immediately translated from the curse of Adam, to the grace of Christ. The original guilt which they brought into the world is mystically washed away, and they receive the forgiveness of all the sins they may themselves have committed: they become reconciled to God, partakers of the Holy Ghost, and heirs of eternal happiness. They acquire a new name, a new hope, a new faith, a new rule."

The same author further says, that "all those expressions—regeneration—born of water and of the Spirit—begotten again to a lively hope—born again not of corruptible seed, &c.—all relate to the simple act, once performed, on every individual."

And again, "the word Regeneration is in the

Scripture solely and exclusively applied to the one immediate effect of Baptism once administered, and is never used synonymously to the repentance or reformation of Christians, or to express any operation of the Holy Ghost upon the human mind subsequent to baptism."

Another divine has more recently published in the form of a cheap tract, which has been widely circulated with the sanction of eminent names, sentiments of the same description.

This author says, that in baptism a supernatural grace is conferred—a new principle put into us—a new principle of life and action, even the Spirit of grace—the sanctification of the Spirit, which makes us heirs of salvation, and entitles us to eternal life;" and this, he adds, "extends to every one, to whom baptism is rightly administered—that to deny this, is to deny its sacramental character—is heresy—is, in some sense, doing despite to the Spirit of grace"—and that, "no other regeneration is possible in this world."

These sentiments, I conceive, are extremely erroneous, and highly dangerous to the the souls of men; leading them to rest in "a form of godliness," and keeping them from seeking those influences of the Holy Ghost to which, in Scripture, every thing that is truly good in experience and practice is ascribed. It appears, therefore, to me, that a serious consideration of the text, will tend to expose the fallacy of the opinions just stated; and shew that the change we plead for is something more, something far greater, than baptism by water.

From this text, I make this simple observation, that

All real Christians are born of God.

This agrees with what our Lord says in his discourse with Nicodemus, in the third chapter of

John's gospel, the third and following verses, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In the margin it is, "*born from above*." And in the fifth verse our Lord says, in answer to the objection of Nicodemus, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"—what is meant by being "born of water and of the Spirit" I shall explain by and by: but our Lord chiefly insists upon being "born of the Spirit." In the 8th verse, he says "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." We cannot doubt, I think, that being "born of the Spirit" means the same as being "born of God" in the text. It is a birth, *spiritual*, *heavenly*, *and divine* in its nature; and is carefully distinguished, in the words of the text, from every other kind of birth.

The apostle in the text affirms that all believers are born, "*not of blood;*" "nor of the will *of the flesh;*" "nor of the *will of man*," but, OF GOD. "Not of blood;" by which I apprehend, is meant not by a natural descent from Abraham, in which the Jews trusted and boasted; and in which St. Paul once trusted—when he was in a natural state, while neither they nor he resembled their ancestor, nor "walked in the steps of his faith." Nor is this birth to be ascribed to "the blood of circumcision," on which also the Jews placed much dependence; just as nominal Christians now do upon baptism, not regarding the circumcision of the heart; and of this the apostle speaks decidedly in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans, "for he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward, in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one *inwardly*, and circumcision is that of the *heart;* in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God." May

this passage be seriously considered by those who believe that external baptism is enough, and that the internal baptism of the Spirit is unnecessary.

Again, it is said, "not of the flesh"—this inward and spiritual change is not derived from our natural parents; is not to be ascribed to their piety, their prayers, their good advice, or good wishes for their offspring, for all these, alas! too frequently fail. Nor is it to be ascribed to the virtue of any ceremonial observances, which are sometimes called *flesh*, even the appointments of God, of an external kind, when depended upon to the neglect of their spiritual design. St. Paul alludes to these, when he speaks of "confidence in the flesh," which he once had, when he was in a natural state. (Phil. 3.)

It is further said in our text, "not of the will of man;"—not from any innate principle of man; not from any goodness of our own hearts, nor from the eloquence of man; the most powerful arguments of the most holy and zealous ministers of the gospel may be unavailing; they may be "instructors," but without the Spirit of God, they cannot be "fathers" in Christ. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but the increase is of God.

Having stated, then, that it is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; he affirms that it is "of God;" he ascribes this new nature to the will and power of God. It is of his own free, sovereign will, as St. James expresses it. (ch. i. 18.) "Of his own will, begat he us, with the word of truth; that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

And the expression, "born of God," certainly denotes the holy effect of this spiritual change; for to be "born of God" must signify, being made the "partaker of a divine nature." As children partake of the same nature with their parents, so he that is born of God must be a partaker of "a divine nature," as it is affirmed by St. Peter, (2 Pet. i. 4)—"Whereby are given unto us great and precious promises,

that by these we might be partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Surely, all this must denote something far more and greater than baptism.

We shall now produce from scripture, certain effects of this divine birth, and then let it be fairly examined whether they are always found in persons who have been baptized.

In the first place, All those who are born of God have received Christ.

The text refers to such persons in the twelfth verse of this chapter—"to as many as *received him*, to them gave he power to become the sons of God—even to them that *believe on his name*." Here it is affirmed that all who are born of God, *receive Jesus Christ:* and it is as much the character of believers *now*, to receive Jesus Christ, as it was then. He is set before us in the gospel; he is exhibited, proposed, and tendered to us, as an all-sufficient Saviour, who by his obedience unto death, has brought in everlasting righteousness. And in Romans, v. 11. we are said "to rejoice in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have *received the atonement*." Believing in Jesus is an evidence of being born of God, as also saith the apostle John, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Now can all this be said of every baptized person? Do not many such persons reject, not receive, Christ? Do not many substitute their own merits, in the room of the righteousness of Christ; not submitting to his righteousness? Do they not refuse to submit to his instructions as the great Teacher, preferring the dictates of their own judgment and the opinions of a mistaken world? and do not the unholy lives of many declare that they reject him as a king, and will not suffer him to reign over them?

Secondly. It is affirmed in 1 John, iii. 9. that "whosoever is born of God, doth not *commit sin*, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin,

because he is born of God"—that is, because he partakes of a divine nature by means of his new birth. By "*committing* sin," we are to understand living *habitually* in sin; for "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not:" but believers do not make, as it were, a trade of sin; or live in the wilful habitual practice of it, being "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." 1 Pet. i. 23.

But can it be said of the bulk of professing Christians—of baptized persons—that they "do not commit sin?"—We are constrained to believe the contrary.

Thirdly. It is testified by the apostle John, (1 Eph. v. 4.) that all "who are born of God, *overcome the world.*" And in another place it is written—"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." Believers, that is, persons born of God, are enabled to conquer the pleasures and allurements of this world; faith realizes the great invisibles of eternity, so that the most splendid things of time appear like the baubles and toys of children. So Moses, when he might have commanded the honours and pleasures of the Egyptian court, renounced them all, and chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" like the apostle Paul, who said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Nor can the frowns of the world appal the true believer. It is a certain truth that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." In most ages of the church, the people of God have been called to endure fines, imprisonment, racks, torture, and flames, for the sake of Jesus Christ; but still they were made more than conquerors through him that loved them.

But is this the character of all baptized Chris-

tians? Do we not see them thronging the broad road that leads to destruction? Has their baptism changed the disposition of their hearts, so that they do not love the world, nor the things of the world? Are they not profane, drunken, and lewd, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God?

Once more, fourthly, That the great change of which we speak, the new birth, is somewhat infinitely superior to baptism, appears from its being always represented in scripture as *effected by the special power of God*, particularly in Eph. i. 18—20. St. Paul, writing to the Christians at Ephesus, compares the power of divine grace which had changed their hearts, to the "mighty power exerted on the body of Christ when he was raised from the dead: It is therefore called, a *resurrection*, as well as a regeneration. "You hath *he quickened*," says the Apostle to the Ephesians, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." And, in another place, it is said, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Sometimes it is termed, "A creation," which must doubtless be the work of God; as St. Paul speaks, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature*," or "a new creation:" and the same sentiment is expressed by "taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh." But is it possible that the application of water to the body should produce such a change? Do we not see multitudes of baptised persons, who have not had the heart of stone removed? Is it not evident, then, that to be "born of God," or, to be "a new creature," must signify something more and greater than to be baptized with water?

I shall now make an observation or two, and then hasten to a conclusion. It is pleaded by the advocates for baptismal regeneration, that our Lord says, John, iii. 5. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born *of water and of the*

Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It should be noticed, that when our Lord uttered these words, baptism, as a Christian ordinance, had not been instituted, though the baptism of John was generally practised; but it is not likely that our Lord would insist in this solemn manner on the absolute necessity of baptism, when as yet it was not ordained by Christ himself. The most natural interpretation of being "born of *water* and of the *Spirit* is, that the grace of God purifies the soul, as water cleanses the body. In like manner it was predicted of Christ, "he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with *fire;* that is, the grace of God, the Spirit, shall operate on your souls like fire, consuming the dross of corruption in your natures. Besides, there is no more reason to suppose that baptism is always accompanied by the regenerating influence of the Holy Ghost, than that in the Lord's Supper every communicant is made a partaker of the body and blood of Christ, to his spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; doubtless it is too often received in an unworthy, and therefore fruitless manner.

Besides, if persons will maintain, as the authors I have alluded to do, that being born of water and of the Spirit necessarily signifies baptism—what will be the consequence? I conceive, nothing less than the eternal damnation of every one that is not baptised; for Christ solemnly declares, that Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God; and if baptism be regeneration, then it follows, that if a person be not baptised, he cannot be saved. But who will venture to assert this? If children, for instance, are not baptised, it is generally occasioned by the neglect of their parents; and will any person dare to assert that children shall be condemned for this fault of their parents?

Besides, these is a great number of pious persons, who conscientiously reject infant baptism, and think that none but adults ought to be baptised; nevertheless, their own baptism is deferred, perhaps from

an unfounded fear that they are not proper subjects of baptism; in the same manner as many abstain from the Lord's table; but shall they therefore be condemned? and would it not be uncharitable in the extreme to say they are not born of God, but are the children of the devil, because water has not been applied to them? There is another class of Christians, who reject baptism altogether, and the Lord's Supper too; I do not plead for such an opinion or practice; but must they therefore be doomed to destruction? They must, if baptism be regeneration; for, on that principle, the unbaptized are unregenerated, and the unregenerate cannot be saved.

Another text is pressed into this service. We are referred to Titus, iii. 5. where we read of "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost:" and some maintain, that baptism is here intended, and that it is the renewing of the Holy Ghost; especially say they, as the word *washing* may be rendered *laver;* but it is by no means certain that here is any allusion at all to baptism; and if there be any allusion to the laver used by the Jewish priests, it is merely to shew, that as water purifies the body, so the Spirit of Christ purifies the soul. The latter sentence, "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," is explanatory of the former, and the plain meaning is, "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration—*even* the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Antiquity is also pleaded for the purpose of proving that baptism is regeneration. It is freely admitted, that some of the early writers, called the Fathers, in the second and following centuries, did speak in this manner. But this may be readily accounted for. Such was the state of the world at that time, and such the danger of making a public profession of Christianity, that it was charitably concluded that all adult persons, coming forward by baptism to profess themselves Christians, were sincere, and therefore it was presumed that the bap-

tised were regenerated, and this led them to call the *sign* by the name of the thing signified; baptism being an outward and visible sign of that inward and spiritual grace.

In like manner many of the ancient writers call baptism, *illumination;* and baptised persons, the illuminated; not that they supposed the minds of men to be illuminated by the rite of baptism; but they charitably concluded that the baptised were illuminated. But all this does not make it necessary to suppose that baptism and regeneration are the same thing. The fact is, they called the *sign* by the name of the thing signified, and the consequence has been injurious.

We also freely admit, that in an *external* and *ecclesiastical* sense, baptised persons may be said to be regenerate. Converts from the Heathen, the Jewish, and the Mahometan world, are, by baptism, *christianized*, or, as it is vulgarly called *christened*, regularly devoted to Christ—they assume a Christian profession; they are "baptised unto Christ," as Israel was "baptised unto Moses in the cloud and by the sea." But it is dangerous in the extreme to maintain, that no other regeneration is necessary than that which is external in baptism; it remains to baptised, as well as to unbaptised persons, an unchangeable and solemn truth, "Ye must be born again."

I shall close this discourse with a passage from Dr. Doddridge, in his sermons upon regeneration, which is worthy of the most serious consideration: "And though persons are taught to speak of their state, in consequence of baptism, in very high, and I fear dangerous terms, yet when good men come to explain those terms, it evidently appears that many of whom they are used, are so in a state of salvation, as to be daily obnoxious to damnation—so the children of God, as also to be children of the devil—and so inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, as to be children of wrath and on the brink of hell."

Let us beware, then, of depending upon our baptism, without being made spiritually "new creatures in Christ Jesus." To me and to many persons this appears to be a dangerous doctrine; and though it should be publicly pleaded for by men of great learning, eminent station, and circulated through the country by high authority, yet I must deem it my duty as one, though one of the most unworthy of the watchmen in Israel, to cry aloud and sound the alarm when the souls of men are endangered by a destructive error. It matters not by what names, ancient or modern, error is maintained and sanctioned, we must and do refer to "the law and to the testimony;" and if men speak not according to these, it is because "there is no truth in them."

Let us, my brethren, seriously enquire, each for himself, Am I born of God? and the answer does not seem to be difficult. We quoted several passages of Scripture, in which the Apostle tells us what are the characters of persons who are born of God; they are persons who have "received Christ," who "do not commit sin," and who have "overcome the world." By these marks we may know whether we are born of God or not.

And let us, if born of God, render it manifest in the whole of our character and conduct. Let us consider what dispositions of mind, and what kind of behaviour may be expected from persons of such high birth. Let us, "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we are to shine as lights in the world." Let us be "followers, or imitators, of God as dear children."

Finally, Let us recollect what future and eternal blessings appertain to us as children of God. If we are born of God, we are the children of God; and "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ;" to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be everlasting praises. Amen.

SERMON LXXXIX.

INVOCATION OF CHRIST.

Romans x. 13. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.

THE Jews were for many ages the peculiar people of God. The introduction of the Gentiles into the church, was a mystery which had been hidden from the world; and therefore when that great event took place, it was difficult to reconcile the Jewish Christians to it. The apostles themselves, who were Jews, were not forward to obey their Master's command—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel in every nation, and to every creature." God led them to it, as it were, by miracles; and the apostles found it necessary to quote passages from those prophets who had predicted this event; and to shew the Jews how they were then fulfilling. Of this nature and design are the words of our text, which are quoted from the prophecy of Joel, (ch. ii 32.) which scripture was a prediction of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, and is so applied by St. Peter, in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The words of our text are, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved;" in the prophet Joel, it is, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of JEHOVAH shall be saved." Doubtless, Jesus Christ is the person intended in the text, as all the verses connected with it clearly shew: and, if so, this passage of scripture, like many others, proves that

Jehovah, the name of the divine essence, is applicable to our Lord Jesus Christ, and affords, among many others, an unanswerable proof of his divinity.

For the illustration and profitable use of these words, I shall,

First, Make a few observations upon them; and,

Secondly, Shew more particularly that Jesus Christ is properly an object of religious worship.

In the first place we shall make a few observations on the words of the text—"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved."

1. Salvation is the grand concern of an awakened sinner. It is the grand concern of him who "calls upon the name of the Lord," as the words "shall be saved," plainly shew. This was the object the apostle had in view, as you find in the first verse of this chapter—"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved;" and in the ninth verse, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be *saved.*" Salvation is deliverance—deliverance from imminent danger, the danger of God's eternal wrath—the "wrath to come," and which will ever remain, "the wrath to come." The person who calls upon the name of the Lord, is one who has been convinced that he has broken the holy law of God, and incurred its dreadful penalty, which is eternal death; he is afraid of God's judgments; and well he may; for "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hence he anxiously looks out for help; his enquiry is, "What shall I do to be saved?" Ask yourselves, my friends, whether you have been brought into this state? and whether you have thus called upon the name of the Lord,

from a sense of danger? You know in what manner the scriptures represent the condition of the sinner—sometimes it is that of a guilty and condemned criminal, in danger of punishment; sometimes it is that of a sick man ready to die, under the power of disease; sometimes it is that of a sheep, which has strayed from the fold, and is in danger of being devoured by wild beasts. Indeed every expression of danger is employed, in the illustration of the case of a sinner; and we should all be concerned to know that this is our condition, that so we may be induced to call upon the name of the Lord.

2. Calling upon the name of the Lord is an expression of faith in the heart.

No one calls on the name of the Lord, till he is persuaded that the Lord can help him, in his particular case; and this is evident from the fourteenth verse of this chapter; "How then shall they call upon him, in whom they have not believed"—believed in what? That which is called, in the eighth verse, "the word of faith, which we preach;" the word of the gospel, which a man "believeth with his heart unto righteousness;" for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"—believing the testimony and promise of God in the gospel is supposed in this case; and the apostle particularly refers to believing, in the heart, the resurrection of Christ. In the ninth verse, it is said, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved:" because the resurrection of Christ is the great proof of his ability to save, and that he is accepted of the Father, in the character of a Saviour: for, as the apostle elsewhere argues, "if Christ be not risen, then is your faith vain; ye are yet in your sins." And in another place, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also in vain." But Jesus was both

"delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;" so that we may join in the language of the apostle Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

3. Again. You will find this calling upon the Lord, is accompanied with confession: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation;" there is a confession suitable to all Christians, in their joining some Christian society, in order to partake of divine ordinances; for though no particular form of doing this is specified in the scriptures, yet almost all churches require some open profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and doubtless our Lord himself requires it, for he has said, Matthew, x. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him also will I confess before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

4. But the text has certainly a particular reference to prayer—calling on the name of the Lord in prayer, and this necessarily supposes a belief that he is able to hear and to answer prayer; which he could not be, if he were a mere man, existing only in one place, and able to attend to one petition only at a time, and that where he is corporally present: whereas Jesus says, for the comfort of his followers, "where two or three are met together in my name, there am I, in the midst of them." Calling upon the name of the Lord, includes a personal application to Jesus for salvation; renouncing all dependence upon our own righteousness. It is the reverse of that for which the Apostle so much blames his countrymen in the third verse of this chapter; "for they, being ignorant of God's righteousnsss, and going about to establish

their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Calling on the Lord implies a submission to the righteousness of the Lord, and he who thus calls, must believe that "there is no name under heaven, given among men, whereby we can be saved, but the name of the Lord Jesus."

I proceed now, in the second place, more particularly to shew that Jesus Christ is properly an object of religious worship.

Indeed, this is already sufficiently proved, for *reliance* upon Christ, and *calling* upon him as a Saviour, are the highest acts of worship we can perform; and it would be the height of folly to suppose that, if he were not God, he could save all the millions of sinners, who in all ages and countries should call upon him. But that Christ is an object of religious worship not only to men but to superior beings appears from Heb. i. 6, where Jehovah says, "Let all the angels of God worship him;" and so we find in the visions of St. John, Rev. v. 11—13. "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, proclaiming with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

It is evident from several parts of the New-Testament, that it was the character, the distinguishing character, of the first Christians that they "called upon Christ." In the 11th and 12th verses of this chapter, it is said, "whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed; for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all them that call upon him;" which supposes that all persons of this description, all who are real believers, do call upon him; for, in

order to shew there is no difference between Jew and Greek, he says "the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him. He is the Lord both of Jews and Gentiles, and he is rich unto all who call upon him. This supposes that all the saints do call upon him; and he is rich, inexhaustible in the riches of his merit and mercy, and exceedingly bounteous in his saving blessings to all sorts of persons, of whatever rank or nation—to all and every one who invokes and worships him as a divine Saviour.

If we look into the history of the primitive Church, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find this was their character, they called upon the name of the Lord. For instance, in the 9th chapter of the Acts, and the 13th and 14th verses, Ananias says, concerning Saul of Tarsus, who was just come to Damascus, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy Saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests, to bind all that *call on thy name*."—It is evident that all real Christians, or saints, were persons who "called upon the name of the Lord. See likewise the twenty-first verse, "all that heard him," that is, converted Saul, "were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which *called on this name* in Jerusalem?" And in the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, first chapter and second verse, the apostle gives this description of Christians "unto the church of Christ which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints; with all, that in every place *call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*, both theirs and ours." Nothing can be more clear than that this was the character of the first Christians, that they called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, our common Lord, whom we, and all true Christians join in acknowledging and adoring as their Lord and ours.

Once more, we find a similar expression in the twenty-second of the Acts of the Apostles, and the

sixteenth verse; there it is said to one, "Why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, *calling on the name of the Lord.*" Here "calling on the name of the Lord," is united with baptism, which is certainly a solemn act of religious worship; and it is performed in the name of *Christ*, equally as in the name of the "Father and of the Holy Spirit." The commission is, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is an ordinance of consecration, or dedication to the service, of whom? The Father, Son, and Spirit, as one God; and I know not whether this may be the meaning of what we read of, in a very early part of the sacred scriptures, namely in the days of Enos, the son of Seth. "Then men began to call on the name of the Lord," Gen. iv. Various views have been given of that scripture, but "the name of the Lord" is very frequently a title given to Jesus Christ, in the Old Testament; and calling upon the name of the Lord, may bear the same meaning there, that it afterwards had; distinguishing between true believers in the Son of God, and those who rejected him.

Of a similar nature is the apostolic form of benediction generally used in Christian churches, when the public service is concluded—"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you"—and it is remarkable that, in some of these benedictions, the name of Jesus Christ stands first; not to denote superiority; but certainly in the position of the sentence, cannot denote inferiority; and the order is changed in different places, perhaps to shew that these Three are indeed One. The grand doctrine of the Trinity, including the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, whatever may be the efforts of adversaries, will never be banished from the Church, while these scriptural forms are retained in it.

And not only so, but we have instances of pious

individuals calling upon the name of the Lord, and in the most peculiar and trying circumstances. For instance, the first Christian martyr, Stephen. (Acts, vii. 59.) While they were stoning Stephen, he was calling upon God, or invoking, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Who but God can receive, and preserve the departing spirit of a saint? and it is observable that these are the same words, or nearly the same words, which our blessed Lord addressed to his Father in his last moments upon the cross: so that this petition of Stephen ascribes the same power and grace to the Son, that the Son of God himself ascribed to the Father.

The Apostle Paul likewise speaks of himself, as paying this honour to the Son. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9 — when he was earnestly desirous of the removal of that thorn in the flesh, which he thought might hinder his usefulness—"For this thing, I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me; and he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness; most gladly therefore will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Jesus Christ is, doubtless, that Lord upon whom he called, and from whom he received this answer.

I will mention one more instance, that of the Apostle Thomas, after that fit of unbelief, as I may call it, when he declared he would never believe the resurrection of Christ without ocular demonstration of it: but, when he was convinced, "Thomas said unto him, My Lord and my God." Some would evade the force of this argument, by saying, it was only an exclamation, occasioned by sudden surprise; but I apprehend the apostles were not accustomed to this profanity of language; they were not used to express themselves vainly and lightly, in taking into their lips the sacred name of God. It was therefore not a profane exclamation, but a solemn invocation; and it was as much as to

say, Thou art my Lord, and my God; though I did doubt of it, I now am perfectly convinced.

I shall only add, that the Apostle John recommends this worship of Christ, in his first epistle, chap. v. verses 13 and 14, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God; and this is the confidence that we have in *Him*, That, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know we have the petitions that we desired of him." Now it is observable, that, in the same epistle, chap. iii. ver. 22, the same mode of expression is used with reference to God the Father, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him." Surely then, this affords a proof that the Lord Jesus Christ is properly the object of divine worship.

That these were the views of the primitive Christians, will be made to appear, from several instances recorded in ecclesiastical history, a few of which shall be mentioned.*

Ignatius, of Antioch, who suffered for the faith, about the year 117, and who had conversed with some of the apostles, thus begins one of his epistles: —"I glorify Jesus Christ our God, who hath given unto you this wisdom."

Again, Polycarp of Smyrna, another martyr, who suffered in the year 167, said, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ himself the eternal High Priest, the Son of God, build you up in faith, and truth, and in all meekness, to live without anger," &c. and when he was brought to the stake he concluded his last prayer with his doxology to the Trinity, "I bless thee, I praise thee, I glorify thee for all things, together with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, with whom,

* See a Sermon by bishop Horne, on Romans, x. 13. vol. v. p. 189.

unto thee, and the Holy Spirit, be glory, both now and for ever, world without end ;" which doxology seems to have been common in Christian churches, from that time to this.

There was another eminent man named Justin Martyr, who flourished about the middle of the second century ; he uses these words, " We worship and adore the God of righteousness, and his Son, and the Holy Spirit of prophecy." Yet, a little after, he tells the emperor, " We hold it unlawful to worship any but God alone."

Again, in the Dioclesian persecution, Eusebius the historian, says, " that the inhabitants of a city in Phrygia, men, women, and children, while assembled in the church, were surprised by their enemies, and burnt, calling upon Christ, God over all."

To which I shall only add, it is well known that Pliny the historian, writing to the emperor concerning the Christians, mentions it as a common custom among them, to meet, on a certain day, before it was light, and sing a hymn to Christ as God. The testimonies fully prove that Jesus Christ was considered by the first Christians, as a proper object of religious adoration; or, according to the words of our text, that " they called upon the name of the Lord."

IMPROVEMENT.

Is calling upon the name of the Lord, the practice of real Christians—have we then done it? Do we know any thing of thus calling upon the name of the Lord. Some perhaps call upon the name of the Lord in a light, trifling, and profane way ; this alas ! is to call down condemnation on their own souls ; and it is very shocking to hear men, and women too, in the street, exclaiming, " O Christ-!" But it is a blessed prayer, " O Christ, hear us and help us ?" Or, as it is expressed in the Litany of the Established Church, " Son of God,

we beseech thee to hear us; O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world; have mercy upon us—O Christ hear us—Christ have mercy upon us:" and what an encouragement does this text afford us when calling upon him. It is a positive promise, like that well-known scripture—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

With what confidence may we call upon the name of the Lord, seeing that he is the Almighty God. We may derive much encouragement from the success of those who, when our Lord was upon earth, called upon him for various purposes. Let me remind you of a few instances. You recollect the poor miserable leper (Matt. viii. 2.) who fell down before him and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The gracious answer of our Lord was, "I will, be thou clean." When the centurion applied to Jesus in behalf of his servant, who was sick of the palsy and grievously tormented, he immediately said, "I will come and heal him." When a certain ruler worshipped him, and said, "My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thine hand upon her, and she shall live;" Jesus heard, and it was done. Again, a poor woman, who had been long diseased, touches the hem of his garment; her heart called upon him, though her lips were silent; the cure was granted, and "she was made whole from that hour." Two blind men cried aloud, "Thou son of David, have mercy on us," and their eyes were opened. The friends of a dumb man cried to him for help, and the dumb spake. Peter, sinking in the sea, cried "Lord! save me. I perish!" The compassionate Saviour caught him, and saved him. When the Canaanitish woman cried, "Have mercy upon me, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil;" Jesus heard, and replied, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Time would fail us to recount all the instances of success, which attended those who cried to the Lord for temporal benefits;

and can we suppose the compassionate heart of Jesus will feel less for us, when we call upon him for the salvation of our immortal souls! One instance more must be mentioned. When he was hanging upon the cross, between two malefactors, and when there seemed to be the least encouragement to call upon him as a Saviour, one of the sufferers, whose heart God had touched with compunction, called upon him, and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom:" he called not upon him in vain; Christ immediately and graciously answered, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." O, then, with what confidence may we call upon him, and rely upon him; and unite with the apostle in saying, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Each of us has an immortal soul; what have we done with it? To whom was it offered? How was it employed? In the service of Christ, or of Satan? Have we committed it to Christ for salvation? He will receive it; he will keep it; he will be faithful to his trust. Well then, let each of us resolve—"I will call upon him, as long as I live."

Now unto Him, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, the one God of our salvation, be glory in all the churches, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XC.

THE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION.

John, v. 25. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

WHAT is true religion? This is a question, in the decision of which every person is deeply interested. True religion is more than a form of sound words; more than a scriptural mode of worship and discipline; more than a course of decent and respectable morals. What more? According to our text, it is *A life*—a *new spiritual life*—the life of God in the soul of man; a spark, as it were of the divine nature—a birth derived from the Spirit of God.

Thus speaks my text. The words before us are full of majesty; they are the words of the Son of God, who "spake as never man spake;" and they were spoken in vindication of his character and mission against the cavils of the Jews. He had performed a great miracle at the pool of Bethesda; he had healed, in a moment, a poor man who had been a cripple almost forty years: but the Jews, instead of being thereby convinced that he was the true Messiah, opposed and persecuted him. But he asserts his power to perform the same divine actions as his

Father; and he claims the same divine honours. Now one of the most glorious displays of the divine power is the resurrection of the dead; and "as the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." This power, he declares in our text, shall accompany his word; and he introduces the declaration with his usual solemnity, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." There is a two-fold resurrection spoken of in this chapter, of both of which Christ is the author; the first is a spiritual resurrection, or the renewal of the souls of men who are dead in sins; and the other is a corporeal resurrection: or raising up the dead bodies of men from the grave. The first is spoken of in the text; the other is asserted in the 28th and 29th verses of this chapter: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Of the spiritual resurrection, intended in the text, he says, not only the hour cometh, but it now is; and doubtless divine power attended the discourse of which our text is a part; and God grant that the same power may now attend his word, that some here present may, at *this* hour, hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

Here let us notice the four following particulars.

First. The condition of all natural men—they are "dead."

Secondly. The description of the gospel—it is "the voice of the Son of God."

Thirdly. The application of this with divine power—"the dead shall *hear* the voice of the Son of God;" and,

Lastly. The happy effect of all this—"and they that hear shall live."

First. Let us notice the condition of all natural men, as here described; "the *dead* shall hear." Nothing, my friends, is of greater importance in practical religion, than to be well acquainted with our true state and condition, as fallen creatures, as the children of Adam, in whom we all fell from his original state, the state in which he was created. Upon this, therefore, the scripture frequently insists; and to render us the better acquainted with it, it is illustrated by many similitudes. Here it is represented as *a state of death;* not that of the body, though that will assuredly follow, as the wages of sin; but that state of the soul, even in a living person, which unhappily resembles death. Thus St. Paul, when he congratulates the Ephesian Christians on their conversion, refers to their former condition before conversion. (Ephes. ii. 1.) He says, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" and the same apostle, speaking of a person living in sin, (1 Tim. v. 6.) expressly says, "She that liveth in pleasure, (luxuriously and carnally devoted to sensual passions) is dead whilst she liveth."

The propriety of this similitude will appear, if you recollect the following particulars. The dead are in a state of perfect ignorance: whatever is passing in the world, even among those who were their nearest and dearest relations and friends, they know it not. Whatever improvements are making in science; whatever revolutions take place upon earth, they know them not. And is not the state of every natural man, a state of ignorance? Yes; "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them," while remaining in that state, for "they must be spiritually discerned." The dead are totally inactive. As the tree falls so it lies:

and thus it is with dead souls, the eye is closed to all the glorious objects of the gospel. The ear is shut against all the charming sounds of grace. Not a breath of prayer ascends to God. Not a step is moved towards the heavenly world.

Death is a state of deformity. The once beautiful countenance is bereft of all its charms, and becomes shocking and ghastly. Abraham says, of his beloved Sarah, "Bury my dead out of my sight." And has not sin despoiled man of his original beauty; for once he was beautiful indeed; bearing the glorious resemblance of his great and holy Maker; but now, the holy God turns away with disgust from the sinner, for "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."

Putrefaction soon follows after death; for "all flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field."—More odious to the infinitely holy God is iniquity, obscenity, prophaneness, and every other vice, than the putrifying carcase to living mortals, for "the throat of the wicked"—his abominable language, is more noisome to God than an open sepulchre?

There is yet another respect in which man may be said to be dead,—he is in a state of condemnation, like a man under sentence of death, and who is therefore said to be "dead in law," though the sentence be not yet executed. Every man is a sinner, and because he is a sinner he stands condemned by the holy law of God; as it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," and unless such a person be relieved from that state by the Gospel, the "wrath of God abideth on him." Believers are, indeed, justified; they have "passed from death unto life," but before a man believes in Christ, and so takes the benefit of the heavenly act of grace, he continues "in his sin," and "the wrath of God abides upon him;" and not only so, but living under the gospel, his unbelief creates an additional and worse offence, and ex-

poses him to additional penalties; for "he that believeth not is condemned already; and condemned chiefly because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." But let us proceed,

In the second place, to consider that description of the gospel which is given us in the text—"The dead shall hear"—hear what?—"The voice of the Son of God," and that voice is no other than the word of Christ, in and by the gospel.

It is generally understood that, at the great day, the Son of God will descend from heaven in great glory, and then, according to the twenty-eighth verse of this chapter, "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth." We conceive as we ought, very highly of that majestic voice, accompanied, as it will be, with the exertion of power truly Almighty; when all the countless millions of the dead, long before mingled with the dust, shall reassume the human form, and, re-animated with the human spirit, shall ascend to stand at the tribunal of Christ. To this is compared, in our text, the voice of the Son of God in the gospel. How great and glorious then is that gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation:" for, observe, it is the same voice which shall hereafter raise the dead bodies of men from the grave, which now raises the dead soul from its state of nature and sin.

Our blessed Lord once resided on our earth; he travelled about Judea and Galilee, preaching the kingdom of God from city to city, from town to town, from village to village; in the temple, in the synagogue, on the mountains, in ships—wherever he had an opportunity—wherever an audience could be collected: but he has long since left our world, and transferred this work to other and meaner hands. The apostles were his first messengers; and when their labours were finished, the great work devolved on the ordinary pastors and teachers

of the churches. Preaching the Gospel is a divine ordinance, to be continued to the end of time; and those whom he has qualified for it, and called to it, he will bless in the discharge of their duty; according to his gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Let every divine truth, then, though declared by the lips of fallible men; men of like passions with yourselves, be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God: (1 Thess. ii. 13.) and let the apostolic admonition be duly regarded, "See that ye refuse not him who speaketh from heaven;" for the Gospel, though it may be uttered by fallible lips, is a record or testimony, from heaven, witnessed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; (1 John, v. 10.) and it is at our peril that we neglect it.

Consider also the inestimable value of this word. It clearly *informs* us, concerning the great things which belong to our peace; and "the entrance of this word" into the mind "giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." This word likewise faithfully *warns* us; it kindly sets before us the dreadful danger that awaits the impenitent sinner; according to that which was stated to be the proper business of the prophet of old, when God said to him, (Ezek. iii. 17, and 18.) "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me: when I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speaketh to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." The apostle Paul felt the force of this admonition; and he told the Ephesian elders, when he was taking leave of them, (Acts, 20) that he was "pure from the blood of all men, for he had not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God"—that "he had not ceased, by the space of

three years to warn and beseech every one of them, night and day with tears." Undoubtedly, the same is still the duty of every minister of the Gospel.

In this word also, he affectionately *invites* us. He bids us "seek him, while he may be found;" he assures us, that if "the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, the Lord will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon." All things needful for the salvation of man, being prepared and proposed, he invites all, even those who are to be found in "the high ways and hedges," to come and partake of the Gospel feast, "all things being ready:"—yea, he says, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

In this word also, he graciously and faithfully *promises* a ready welcome; yea, he says, (and what more could we have wished him to say) "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." We are,

In the third place, to consider the application of this word to the heart with divine power—"the dead shall *hear* the voice of the Son of God." The dead *hear?* This is an extraordinary thing indeed! —The dead hear? How can this be? No human sounds; not the shrill blast of the trumpet, nor the horrible roar of the cannon, nor the tremendous peal of thunder, can affect the ear of the dead: yet, "the *dead shall hear* the voice of the Son of God, for that which is impossible to men, is easy to God.

On one memorable occasion, our blessed Lord visited the grave of his friend Lazarus; and when amidst a numerous company, surrounding the tomb, "Jesus cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth:" behold, with astonishment, "he that was dead, came forth." This is amazing! Lazarus hears the voice of the Son of God, and lives; he comes forth, and entertains the Saviour in his house. It is doubtless in allusion to such an effect of divine power as this on a dead body, that our

Lord speaks of the resurrection of a dead soul; and does it not plainly intimate that nothing less than such a power is sufficient for this purpose?—If we know the scriptures; if we know ourselves, we shall readily admit that men are so profoundly and wilfully ignorant; and oftentimes so hardened in their feelings; so wedded to the world; so full of enmity against God and religion; that nothing less than almighty power can effect the change here described,—"the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God."

In this case, the person feels, for the first time, a disposition to hear and regard the word of life, however strong his prejudices might have been before. It is said of Lydia, who was converted to God at Philippi, that "the Lord opened her heart, so that she *attended* to the things which were spoken of Paul." Had not the Lord *opened her heart*, she would not have attended to them: for it is marvellous that the word of God is not *heard* even where it is *spoken;* and were you to go from pew to pew in our places of worship, you would find very few who heard it with *attention*, and fewer still, with *understanding*. The birds of the air take up the seed as soon as it is sown—it has no abiding in the heart of man—I once told you of a person I conversed with when dying; she had been brought up under the word all her life; but she assured me that she never heard but *one sermon*, which was the last. She had never regarded the word at all. And thus many persons attend to hear sermons, who never do hear. O what sin is committed in all our places of worship while the sermon is preaching.

Others are attentive, in some degree; yet they do not *understand* what they hear: but when the Lord speaks to the heart, he causes his voice to be distinguished, and his people know the meaning of it; as the apostle speaks of the Thessalonians, that "they received the word, not as the word of man, but as it is, in truth, the word of God."

And here is the difference between carnal and spiritual hearers; the carnal hearers go to hear the *man;* the spiritual hearers go to hear *Christ* through the man; their language is—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

When the word is heard to purpose, it is heard with *faith*. The word never profits, unless it be "mixed with faith." (Heb. ii.) It is received as the testimony of God, divinely and infallibly true; and he who hears it as the voice of the Son of God, affixes his seal to it, and thereby declares his belief that God is true.

And if the word be thus mixed with faith, it will also be "received with *love*," with cordial esteem and affection. "As new-born babes," the children of God imbibe "the milk of the word;" and each of them can truly say, "How sweet are thy words to my taste; they are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb." "O how love I thy law!"

Once more—He who hears the voice of the Son of God in his word, will hear it *obediently*. When Saul of Tarsus first heard this voice, and knew whose voice it was, he very properly said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Such will be the language of every true believer; there will be a cordial approbation of the divine commandments, as "holy, just, and good," and he will say, with sincerity, "Lord have mercy upon me, and write all these thy laws upon my heart, I beseech thee."

I proceed now to the last particular before us, and that is the happy effect of all this; "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and *they that hear shall live*." As Lazarus lived, from the moment that Christ uttered his voice, and said "Lazarus come forth," so sinners, having heard the quickening voice of Christ in the gospel, commence a new and spiritual life, which shall never cease, but shall issue in life eternal. We said, at the beginning of this discourse, that religion

is a Life; there is a new principle implanted in the souls of men, a principle of motion, of perception, of enjoyment; something that is active and permanent in its nature; according to another figure of speech, used for the same purpose by our Lord, in his discourse with the woman of Samaria; "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."—Here is the abiding, active principle; that which we call life, and in which there is a gradual progression; the babe, the young man, and the father in Christ.

The word of Christ is the instrument of regeneration; "Of his own will," says St. James, "he begat us with the word of truth;" and hence we are said to be "born of God."

All such persons are said to live, according to the 24th verse, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life; he shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." We read also in the fifth chapter to the Romans, of "Justification unto life." The believer is brought into a new state; and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," makes him free from the law of sin and death.

It is also a life of *Comfort*, to which we are called, for, being "justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is satisfaction and pleasure in the word, and ways, and people of God. Believers delight in his service, and find a day in his courts, better than a thousand: they had rather be door-keepers in the house of God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Further, it is a life of *Holiness*. Those who live, "live to the Lord." They are "alive to God, through Jesus Christ;" they are "redeemed to God;" they are no longer the servants of sin; they no longer live to themselves, but to the Lord; his

will being their rule, his honour the great end of all their actions; and then

A life of *Glory* shall crown the whole. This is God's great object; and therefore the believer is said already to "have everlasting life." The title to it he possesses in Christ Jesus, and the first fruits of it are received in the graces and influences of the Holy Ghost.

Thus we have endeavoured to shew the condition of all natural men, they are dead; the description of the gospel, it is the voice of the Son of God; the application of this with power, the dead shall hear; and the happy effects of the whole, they that hear shall live.

CONCLUSION.

How wonderful is the condescension of Christ! He speaks, he speaks even to dead sinners.—To us, even to us, "is the word of this salvation sent!" and O what importance does this give to the preaching of the gospel, to the reading of the Scriptures, and to all divine ordinances! It is the voice of the Son of God. We should remember, whenever we attend them, that we are all present before God; we come to hear the voice of the Son of God. And O let us take care that we hearken to this voice. Does he speak, and shall we not hear? Shall we turn a deaf ear to the calls and entreaties of the Saviour? Behold, says he, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Doubtless it is the character of all true Christians, that they hear the voice of the Son of God. Beware, then, of neglecting or refusing to hear him; for it is written, "If any man will not hear this prophet, he shall be cut off from among the people;" and if any finally refuse to hearken to him, how awful will be his condition another day! Then will he say, "Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and

would none of my reproof; therefore, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." But if, through Grace, we have been enabled, as some of us doubtless have been, to hear his gracious voice, let us, with joy, receive and rely upon the assurance he gives us in the text, that we shall live,—"he that heareth shall live!" May this be our happiness, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XCI.

THE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

Ephesians, iv. 20, 21. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.

THE Gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only efficacious remedy for all the diseases of the moral world—the only effectual relief to fallen, guilty, dying man. We have, at all times, occasion to blush for the vices of mankind, and especially for those of our native country; but, bad as things are, they would be infinitely worse if the influences of the gospel were withdrawn; if the doctrines of Christ were not preached; if Christian examples were not exhibited. Multitudes among us, who are not real and spiritual Christians, happily differ much from men in a heathen state; from such men as are described by St. Paul in the verses preceding our text. Exhorting believers to a holy conduct, he says, verse 17, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind," &c. &c. Such is the faithful but melancholy picture which, from having resided two years at Ephesus, he was enabled from his personal knowledge to draw; but the Gospel of Christ, preached by himself and others, had produced in many persons a happy change. Many, who were once in total darkness, had been

savingly enlightened; many, who had been dead in trespasses and sins, had been spiritually quickened; many, who were once "far from God," had been "brought nigh by the blood of Christ;" and now, he affectionately exhorts them, in this chapter, to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they had been called," ver. 1.—they must differ from their still pagan neighbours, who wallowed in vice; for, say she in our text, "ye have not so learned Christ," or rather—"not so ye—for ye have learned Christ;" having learned of Christ, ye must learn to live *like Christ*. He who taught you, is *himself* holy, and requires you also to be holy.

This sentiment is applicable to all the professed disciples of Christ; to us, my brethren, as well as to the Ephesians. The text then presents to us the following most valuable lesson:

Those who are taught by Christ, are under the strongest obligations to walk according to his instructions.

To illustrate and enforce this sentiment, let us, 1. Consider what is meant by being taught by Christ; and 2. The obligations under which they are laid who are so instructed.

1. What is meant by being taught of Christ—our text speaks of *learning Christ*—of having *heard him*, and of having been *taught by him*, as the truth is in Jesus. These expressions may include *learning of him*, as our teacher; and *learning him*, as the great *subject* of his teaching; for he is both the Master and the Subject.

Christ is the great Teacher of the world. Ineffectual were all the efforts of heathen sages to enlighten the world. The great philosophers had done little or nothing to better the condition of mankind at large. St. Paul, who well knew what their attempts had been, declares that, after all, "the world by wisdom knew not God"—it was re-

served for his own Son to enlighten mankind. Some of the wisest of the heathen sages were honest enough to confess their ignorance, and to declare their expectation of the great Teacher. That Teacher at length appeared. For several years he went about Judea, diffusing heavenly wisdom wherever he went, with a simplicity and dignity that astonished his hearers, and constrained them to say, "Never man spake like this man." Having finished his work upon earth, he confided the business of instruction to other hands; qualifying them for it by his Holy Spirit, and promising to succeed their efforts by his own presence and blessing.

The apostle says that the Ephesians had "heard him, and been taught by him." Not *personally* indeed; for Christ never visited *Ephesus;* but *ministerially*. The apostles and other teachers had "the mind of Christ;" his Spirit had led them into all truth; and both by their preaching and their writings they published it to the world.

We also are still favoured with the word of Christ. Many of our Lord's admirable discourses were committed to writing by the four Evangelists. The apostles also wrote many epistles to churches or individuals; which epistles are of no less authority than the gospels; and taken together with the Old Testament (which is also "the word of Christ") we may still be said to have heard and learned of him. His truth, ministerially declared to us, in and by his ordinance of public preaching, or perused by us in private, is to be received, "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God; which is able to make us wise to salvation, through faith in him." Hence we are exhorted, Heb. xii. 25, to beware "that we refuse not him that speaketh from heaven," and see we are no less bound to regard the written word, than if we heard the voice of Christ himself. This gospel delivered to us, is "the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death," and the original sanction

still attends it. " He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned."

But Christ is not only the great Teacher, but he is, *himself*, the chief subject of all divine teaching. Our text speaks of the truth " as it is *in Jesus*"—he is, as it were, the centre in which all the lines of divine truth meet—he is the great subject of the gospel; so that " preaching Christ," and " preaching the gospel," are the same thing; according to what St. Paul intimates as to his own practice, he was " determined not to know any thing among the people, but Jesus Christ and him crucified." And the words may also refer to the purity of the doctrine taught; to know the truth " as it is in Jesus," is to know and receive the pure unadulterated truth, as it was at first delivered by him and his apostles; and without that mixture of error, which the weakness or wickedness of men has since introduced. Or it may further intimate that to know the truth aright, is to know it *practically*, as not only taught by the *lips* of Jesus, but as also beautifully exemplified in his holy *life;* in his harmless, devout, and benevolent practice; for Christ taught by his example, as well as by his doctrine.

But I think we are to understand by the words chiefly this—that Jesus Christ, and salvation by him, is the sum and substance of what we are to learn. " I am," said Christ, " the truth"—the substance of the numerous ordinances of the old Testament—of their priesthood, their altar, their sacrifices, their washings—they were " the shadows of good things to come;" and they did come, in and with Christ, who is the body, the substance, the soul of them all.

Thus, when St. Paul reproves the Galatians for entertaining some dangerous errors about justification, he aggravates their fault, by saying " O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus

Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you."

It is plain that what he distinguished by the name of "the truth" was, the gospel method of salvation by Jesus Christ—the acceptance and justification of a sinner, through faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ. In short, that great doctrine which is represented in so solemn a manner by St. John, in his first epistle, fifth chapter, and called a *testimony* or *record*, testified by the Three in heaven and Three on earth, which is this, that "GOD HATH GIVEN TO US ETERNAL LIFE; AND THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON.

We by no means exclude from the truth, the DUTIES which devolve upon believers; for we shall presently shew that these are not only necessarily connected, but form an essential part of it.

Indeed, to know the truth of the gospel aright, is to be taught by the Holy Spirit, not merely words and propositions of truth: or to yield the assent of the understanding to them—it is far more; the *heart* as well as the head is influenced; divine things, truly learned, have a powerful influence on the affections of the soul, on the temper and disposition of the heart, and upon the whole conduct, allowing for those deviations and imperfections, which, alas, are found in the best of men.

This is strongly implied in the text, and forms the second branch of our discourse; for the apostle is, you will recollect, exhorting the Ephesians to walk differently from the unconverted heathen, and to be renewed in the spirit of their mind, and, in a word, to become new creatures.

And here we may observe, that the text, with many other similar passages in Scripture, plainly intimates that some who professed to receive the gospel, disregarded its practical influence.

The gospel must be allowed to be "a good

message"—"glad tidings of great joy," and well calculated to excite the attention, the affectionate attention of men in general. And it would do so universally, were it not for the strong and unhappy prejudices of the carnal mind. Hence we find, that although it be "the wisdom of God" and the power of God," it is rejected by some as foolish and irrational, and by others, as even immoral in its tendency. This is intimated by St. Paul, (Rom. vi. 1.) "What shall we say then? Shall we sin, that grace may abound?" And more distinctly, (Rom. iii. 8.)—"And not (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil that good may come;" to which he adds, "whose damnation is just;" that is, the condemnation of those who teach and practise such things, is both certain and just. And St. Jude (ver. 4. of his epistle) speaks of "false teachers, ungodly men, who turned the grace of God (that is, the gospel of his grace) into lasciviousness; perverting the holy gospel into an encouragement to vice.

But this was never the doctrine nor the practice of the apostles and first Christians. Yet we are not to be surprised, if there were some unhappy instances of Antinomian perverseness. The gospel, especially when it becomes the religion of a nation, embraces persons of every description, according to the parable of the net, (Matt. xiii. 47.) "The kingdom of heaven (the dispensation of the gospel) is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, good and bad:" and agreeably to another parable, in which the tares and the wheat are represented as growing together in the same field. St. James also speaks largely of "a dead faith;" a faith "without works;" a faith which does not work, as true faith always does, "by love." But let not St. James be mistaken. He does not assert that true faith may exist without works; for, as faith refers to the testimony of God as believed, he that rejects the necessity of holiness, rejects an essential part

of that testimony; for the gospel insists both on "the water and the blood" which issued from the side of the crucified Saviour, denoting the double virtue of his death, to purify the heart, as well as to purge the conscience.

There may be a high degree of scriptural knowledge, without real grace. St. Paul (1 Cor. xiii.) supposes the possibility of having "all knowledge," and yet being destitute of the essential grace of love, which always accompanies genuine faith. The apostle John is very explicit: he says, (1 Eph. 1. 6.) "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and *walk in darkness*,"—that is, "practise wickedness," we lie, and do not the truth,—we do not act agreeably to the true and holy doctrine of the gospel.

Again. The directions given by the apostles to the churches, as to their conduct towards bad men, ordering them to be excluded from their communion, render it plain that holiness is the law of God's house. And awful beyond description or conception, will be the proceedings in the judgment of the great day of Christ, when all men shall appear before his tribunal, and when all shall be judged according to (the evidence of) their works. The largest account we hear of that decisive day, is from the lips of the Great Judge himself, recorded in the 25th chap. of St. Matthew, which account, you will observe, relates only to the trial of the professors of the gospel, and the sentences then to be pronounced will proceed upon the evidence adduced—the evidence of the fruits of faith, or of the want of them.

Whatever be the conduct of professed Christians, the gospel gives no countenance whatever to unholy tempers or ungodly practices. On the contrary, it always and everywhere insists upon holiness; upon dying to sin, and living to righteousness; and positively declares, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Our Lord, in his charming intercessory prayer,

(John xvii,) prays thus for his disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth;" and it appears from the commission he gave to the apostle of the Gentiles, that he was sent "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, that they might ultimately obtain an inheritance among all them that *are sanctified through faith in Christ.*" And this effect was actually produced, and the evidence that the Gentiles were really converted was, that God had "purified their hearts by faith."

Let us now state some of the obligations under which believers are laid, to walk agreeably to the holy gospel.

1. The unchangeable authority of God. While God is God, and men are his creatures, they must be bound to obey his known will. Their obligation to obedience is not discharged or weakened by their being brought into a new state by grace. They have additional helps, not known to the law, but no discharge from its obligations. They do not, indeed, obey with a view to merit life and the favour of God; nor will their partial failures issue in death; but the authority of God over them is not vacated or diminished. The holy and unchangeable law of God, as to the *substance* of it, is *love*; love to him and love to our fellow-men; and this, according to the stipulations of the covenant of grace, is written by the Spirit on the heart. Some express themselves too loosely on this subject; they say believers will love God, and love will compel them to obedience; it will so; and so far they say well; but why set aside the authority of God to command, and the duty of believers to obey?

2. We argue the necessity of a holy walk, from the whole of the Saviour's gracious designs and undertakings in behalf of his church.

The first intimation of his designs was, that "he should bruise the serpent's head," that is, destroy

his power, counteract his temptations, and restore man from the guilt and misery of the fall. But can this be done without restoring him to the exercise of love and obedience?

Consider the offices of Christ. He is a PROPHET; he teaches the whole will of God; and an important branch of that will is our Sanctification. He deputed his apostles to "teach men to observe all things, whatsoever he commanded them." We know in what a spiritual manner he expounded the law, and pointed out its purity. His disciples ought to make that their constant rule, and be satisfied with nothing less than complete conformity to it; and in this they are assisted by the gospel; therein, "as in a glass they behold the glory of the Lord, and are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord." And this is the argument in the text—Ye have learned Christ, ye have been taught by him. Christ is a holy teacher, and he makes holy disciples; if we are not such, we are not his true disciples.

He is also a PRIEST. The work of a priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices for the people, and also to intercede for them. What one branch of Christ's intercession for his people is, we have already seen; it is that they may be kept from the evil; that they may be holy. To take away guilt was not the only, though it was the first, design of the sacrifice of Christ: he had a further object; he gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity; that he might purify "to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus, ii. 14). He died for us who were dead, that we, who live through him, might not live to ourselves, or to sin, but unto him who died for us and rose again. (2 Cor. v. 14.)

Jesus Christ is likewise a KING; as such he reigns in us and over us. He opposes and restrains both our outward enemies, and our inward lusts. He will not suffer sin to have dominion over us. Other Lords have had dominion, but now he as-

sumes the throne of the heart, and will not endure a rival. The words which follow our text shew what was the design of the writer.—If we truly learn of Christ, then, saith he—"put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness"—or, "the holiness of truth;" and the apostle proceeds to point out particulars; he speaks against lying, excessive anger, dishonesty, improper conversation, bitterness, clamour, and slander; and exhorts to industry, love, and generosity; in short, saith he, "Be imitators of God, as his dear children."

3. A third obligation arises from gratitude—the love of Christ constraineth us; and love is the fulfilling of the law. Of old, God enforced his commandments on Israel, from the consideration of the great things he had done for them. Exod. xx. 2. "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," and we, as Christians, are hereby taught that, "because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments;" because, "he hath delivered us out of the hand of our enemies," we are by gratitude constrained "to serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life."

4. Another argument for holy living is derived from our own personal comfort, which is best promoted thereby. One grand evidence of personal interest in Christ, arises from the fruits of faith. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ," and who are they? they are such as walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Rom. viii. 1.) and St. John says "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments;" and again, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked," (1 John ii. 3—6). Conscience, it is true, derives its peace first from the blood of Christ; but a

holy life affords an additional evidence, by which the reality of our faith is made evident both to ourselves and others.

5. The glory of God, and the good of men, require that we should walk worthy of our vocation. The end that God has in view in all his works is his own glory; it is fit that should also be our end. Christ has assured us that his Father is glorified by our bringing forth much fruit; let this then be our constant aim. Our Lord's direction is, "Let your light shine before men, that, seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father who is in heaven." There is a language in a holy and useful life that cannot be misunderstood; that speaks to the heart; that silences opposition, destroys prejudice, and adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour. This St. Peter recommends to the first Christians, against whom all manner of evil was falsely spoken; "Having," says he, "your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak evil of you, as evil doers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

IMPROVEMENT.

Two great lessons may be learned from this discourse—To KNOW CHRIST—and To LIVE CHRIST. To be taught by him; and then to prove that we *are* so taught, by our holy obedience to his will.

1. Let every one of us be concerned to know him. "It is for our life." Remember the words of our Saviour, (John xvii. 3.) "This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Life is short, and this is the principal business of it. Lose then no opportunity. Improve especially the Lord's Day. Be a diligent hearer of the word; and hear it more than once every Sabbath if possible. Let the hours before sermon, between sermons, and after sermons, be well

employed; and some part of them in secret. Avoid Sunday visitings; they are the bane of religious profession, and tend to undo in the house all that has been done in the Church; unless, which is too seldom the case, the time is devoted to religious exercises; but nothing must exclude *closet religion*. On week days too, find some time for hearing the word. Most people find some leisure for visits and amusements; and can none be found for lectures and meetings for social prayer? Daily read the Scriptures; in so doing, Christ, by his Spirit, will be your teacher, and you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of him.

O what a shame and a sin will it be for any persons to abide in darkness, who dwell in this land of light! How much better would it have been for such to have been born in heathen countries than in this, if the means of grace be wholly neglected!

Is this knowledge, in some happy degree, already attained? Prize it above all acquisitions, and be thankful to your heavenly Teacher. With holy Paul, "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Finally, Let believers evince the excellency of their knowledge, by its holy and excellent effects. The reality and solidity of our professed knowledge must be manifested by its practical effects. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "Ye are my friends," said Christ to his disciples, "if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you. Thus let us "hold forth the word of life," by a conversation "void of offence towards God and all men;" this will convince the world that we have been with Jesus, and that we have so learned of him, as to have become "wise unto salvation."

END OF VOLUME III.

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